South Haven Tribune

$3

February 22, 2026

Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

Work continues this week on the turbine deck at Palisades Nuclear Power Plant in Covert Township.

A robust restart

Palisades Nuclear Plant restart remains in final phases

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

COVERT — The Palisades Nuclear Power Plant is striving to be the first power plant in the United States to be restarted after the decommissioning process had already begun.

Holtec announced in September of 2024 that it planned to restart operations of the plant by October of 2025. However, that deadline has since come and gone and the plant has yet to be restarted.

"The restart is very much well underway," Senior Manager of Government Affairs and Communications Nick Culp said. "We're continuing to work through a very robust restart schedule and, as we said from the beginning, we will be bringing Palisades back online once all of our work is completed and we meet all federal and industry standards for safety and plant reliability."

Culp said they are continuing to work to restart the plant, but have not targeted a restart date.

"We do not have a publicly stated date," Culp said. "We do have, obviously, an internal schedule that we have been following, but the thing that we want to stress publicly ... the most important thing is making sure that all of our work is done, that all federal approvals are received, and that all federal safety and industry reliability standards are met. So that, ultimately, is the major drive."

By early fall of 2025, Holtec received reauthorization of power operations from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which formally transitioned Palisades from being a decommissioning status plant to an operation status plant.

High-voltage transformers have undergone recent inspections at Palisades Nuclear Power Plant in Covert Township.

Palisades Nuclear Power Plant is pictured earlier this week in Covert Township.

"With that, we have been able to receive new fuel, which came to the site and arrived in October and was inspected," Culp said. "Those fuel assemblies were received, inspected on site and then placed into storage, and our spent fuel pool, while they were waiting and loading into the reactor."

Culp said they also completed the process of sleaving the generators during the summer of 2025.

"After that, we decided to do a deep cleaning of the equipment to ensure long-term equipment reliability," Culp said. "Basically preparing them not just to restart, but to be ready to run for decades to come and that's a lot of the work that we're trying to tie up right now, too."

Even though there is no set deadline, Culps said they are

See **PALISADES**, page A2

South Haven to buy lifeguard towers, stands

Council agrees to spend over $85K on beach safety equipment

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven City Council approved the purchase of lifeguard towers and two lifeguard stands during Monday's meeting.

The two Bausch Rescue-T Lifeguard Stands from Bausch Enterprises, Inc. will cost $20,930 and the two lifeguard watch towers will cost $65,200.

Council Member Tom Capps expressed his concerns about the cost of the towers and stands.

"My thought is, is that a couple of the bigger towers – which are a lot of money – we might not need both towers, maybe we only need one to get started," Capps said.

Capps inquired about buying locally to save money, however, City Manager Kate Hosier said they looked at a variety of vendors and the preferred vendor would not be able to deliver anything until after the summer season.

"We also did call other agencies that have a lifeguard program to see if they have any equipment that we could take and they said 'You don't want our stuff, it's too beat up,'" Hosier said.

Police Chief Adam DeBoer said the reasoning behind getting two towers and stands is because they will help the lifeguards properly cover the entire area of South Beach safely.

Housing projects

City council approved an ordinance to amend the city's zoning map.

The amendment rezones 285 Black River St. from an R-1B single-family district to an R-2 single- and two-family residential district.

According to city documents, the applicant would like to develop the property into multi-family condominiums in the future. However, there is no current site

See **LIFEGUARDS**, page A3

South Haven school board reviews technology bids

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven school board discussed four technology bids for the Michigan State Armory renovation project.

Director of Non-Instructional Services Kevin Dee presented the bids to the board during Wednesday's meeting.

The bids include four categories: cabling, audio and visual, access control and security and wireless.

"Once we knew the bond project was going to be fundable and feasible on the construction side of things, then we really geared up and got the technology side out," Dee said.

The total cost for the technology bids is $266,962.64. Dee said they are almost done with the demolition for the project.

"A lot of the demo is done, they are doing the remainder of the demo and then we start putting things back together," Dee said.

The bids will be brought back for approval at the March board meeting.

Wireless upgrades

Dee also presented a district-wide wireless upgrade during Wednesday's meeting.

"We have network wireless devices throughout the district," Dee said. "They were installed about 10 years ago. It's now time for a refresh on the project."

Eighty-five percent of the project will be funded by USF funding E-RATE and the rest will be through bonds. The project will cost $38,276.78.

This will be brought back for approval at the March board meeting.

Other items

The school board approved two new hires including Multilingual Teacher Jaclyn Quintero at Baseline Middle School and English and Language Arts Teacher Natalie Beckman at South Haven High School.

Carlos Salgado from Lincoln Elementary School was chosen for this month's student pride awards. The staff pride award was given to North Shore Elementary School teachers Barb Raak and Adam Lurie.

Pride awards are presented once a month during the school board meetings to at least one South Haven student and staff member. Pride awards are a tradition the school has done for more than 12 years to honor those who have shown excellence in academics and character.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

The Tribune: Celebrating Our 127th Year

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OBITUARIES

Janet Carlson

Sept. 24, 1954 – Feb. 13, 2026

Janet Kay Carlson, 71, of South Haven, Mich. went to be with her Lord and Savior on Friday, Feb. 13, 2026, surrounded by her family.

She was born in South Haven on Sept. 24, 1954, to the late Richard "Bud" and Frances (Polansky) Otto.

Jan married Larry Allen Carlson in South Haven on Sept. 10, 1985. He preceded her in death in 2016.

She is survived by three children – Michael (Jennifer) Strebeck, Matthew "Bo" (Carly Campbell) Strebeck, and Christyn Carlson; along with nine grandchildren – Matthew, Grace, Brody, Memphis, Giana, Everly, Gavin, Wyatt, and Piper. Also surviving is a sister, Charlan Otto.

She was preceded in death by two brothers; Donald and Richard "Dick" Otto.

Prior to retiring, Jan had worked in information technology for South Haven Public Schools and the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, after which she retired in full from Taylor Controls last year.

She was a very active member of VFW Post 667, volunteering her time for meals and events, as well as serving in multiple positions within the post auxiliary.

She was deeply involved in her kids' sports activities, including running the youth bowling league at Lakeside Lanes for more than ten years and serving as a member of the South Haven Rams boosters during their high school years.

She enjoyed gardening and had a deep love of nature, especially the simple joy of feeding the birds and squirrels that visited her yard.

A celebration of life service will be held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, February 21, at Filbrandt Chapel. An hour of visitation will take place prior to the service from 10 to 11 a.m. Pastor Larry Phillips of Calvary Missionary Baptist Church, will be officiating the service.

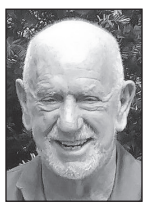
In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in Jan's memory to Al-Van Humane Society as she was a perpetual rescuer of dogs and loved them very much.

Those wishing to share a memory of Jan online may do so at www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel-Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services. 269-637-0333.

David Streeter

Sept. 27, 1938 – Feb. 15, 2026



David LaVerne Streeter, 87, of South Haven, Mich. passed away peacefully on Sunday, Feb. 15, 2026. David was born on Sept. 27, 1938 to Kenneth and Kathleen (Cash) Streeter in Lansing, Mich.

David is survived by his two children; Max Streeter of South Haven, Michael (Michelle) Streeter of Stevensville, Mich., and a brother-in-law Roger Ray, of Atlanta, Mich. Also surviving are four grandchildren; Jeremy (Suzi) Price, Nicholas (Stacy) Streeter, Kenneth Streeter, Patrick Streeter, Amanda Streeter and great- grandchildren; Olivia, Benny, Jett and Ember.

David was preceded in death by his wife of 64 years, Carol Streeter, parents Kenneth and Kathleen Streeter, father and mother-in-law Roland and Doris Shook, brother Bernard Streeter and sister Patricia Ray.

David met the love of his life Carol Shook in high school when he was in the 11th grade. Shortly after graduating high school, they were united in marriage on Nov. 26, 1958 in Lansing, Mich.

David served his country in the United States Airforce. David worked for MDOT as a maintenance crew leader for 33 years until he retired in 1996. He also worked at Balfour Tax.

David was a co-owner for Joint Venture Charters out of South Haven with his brother-in-law Roger Ray and sister Pat for several years. David loved to be outdoors and enjoyed hunting, fishing, mushroom hunting, softball, birdwatching, bowling and golfing. David also achieved his pilot license.

David had a great love for animals and was a great dog dad to several dogs over the years. David was a very kind and loving husband; father and friend and he will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved him.

A celebration of life service will be held at a later date.

Memorials may be made in David's memory to Al Van Humane Society, P.O. Box 421, South Haven, Michigan.

To those who choose to leave a memory or condolence, go to www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel of Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services, 269-637-0333.

Millie Ridner

Aug. 13, 1941 – Feb. 10, 2026

Millie Ridner, 84, of South Haven, Mich. passed away Feb. 10, 2026, peacefully at Laurel Oaks Assisted Living following an extended illness.

Millie's wish was to be cremated and not have a memorial service.

Millie was born Aug. 13, 1941, in Monroe, Mich. to Clifford and Delana (Layne) Ellison. She married Nolan M. Ridner Jr. in 1957.

After retirement in 1995, Nolan and Millie spent the next 25 years wintering in Ft. Myers Beach, Fla., coming back to South Haven for the spring and summer months. Millie enjoyed working around their home and spending time with family. While in Florida, she enjoyed clogging, tennis, riding her bike and happy hour with their many snowbird friends.

Nolan and Millie were members of the Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Haven.

Millie was preceded in death by Nolan in 2022, her parents and six siblings.

She is survived by; children Martin Ridner and April (Vance) Van Wieren; grandchildren AJ (Nichole Keag) Van Wieren and Amber (Jordan) Davoll; great grandchildren Shay Van Wieren (nine), Taylor Davoll (seven) and Jackson Davoll (three), and many nieces and nephews.

In lieu of flowers please donate to Laurel Oaks Assisted Living and/or Gentiva Hospice.

To view Millie's personal web page go to www.starksfamilyfh.com.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Filbrandt Chapel of Starks Family Funeral Homes and Cremation Services, 269-637-0333.

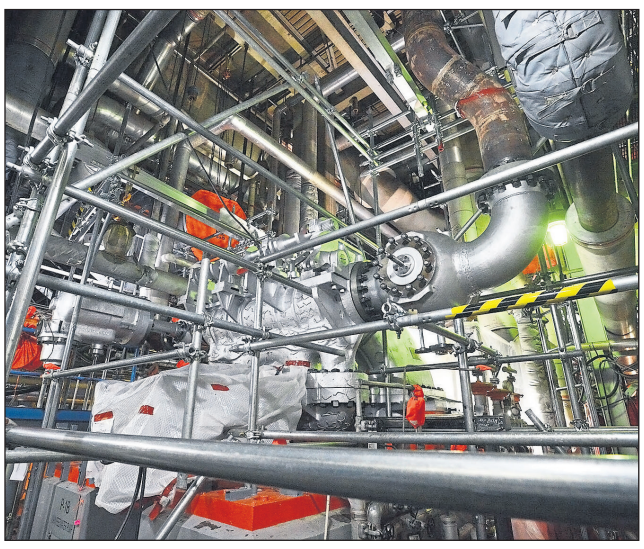
DEATH NOTICE

Howard Schultz

Howard E. Schultz, age 91 of Holland, Mich. passed away on Saturday, Feb. 14, 2026, at Freedom Village. Arrangements are by Dykstra Funeral Homes-Saugatuck Chapel. To sign an on-line registry or leave a memory please visit www.dykstrafuneralhome.com.

Work continues on the turbine deck at Palisades Nuclear Power Plant in Covert Township.

Work continues on the turbine deck at Palisades Nuclear Power Plant in Covert Township.



Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

Work continues this week on the main feedwater pump on the lower levels of the turbine deck at Palisades Nuclear Power Plant in Covert Township.

PALISADES

From page A1

Work continues on the turbine deck at Palisades Nuclear Power Plant in Covert Township.

in the final phases of the restart.

"We recently moved over the reactor vessel head, which we completed scheduled maintenance activities on. It's a 215,000-pound component head itself," Culp said. "So, moving that over, synchronized and doing it safely was an important step."

One of the steps they are currently working on is resealing the primary system.

"We are in the process of resealing what we call the primary system and we're about to go through system passivation, which is a process of putting in a passive, protective coating inside of all the equipment on the primary side or the nuclear side of the plant," Culp said. "Once that's complete, we will then be in a position to prepare to start loading new fuel."

Another big step the plant is working on is completing maintenance and inspection activities throughout the plant to make sure it's ready to go back into service.

"It's not just about getting Palisades resynced to the grid and generating electric; it's about making sure we're doing those long-term investments now while we still have the benefit of the plant being offline and taking advantage of that time that we currently have," Culp said.

He said the plant being offline gives them a unique opportunity to do more work that they typically wouldn't be able to do with it being online.

"The work that we're doing now is not your standard, 30-day, refueling maintenance outage, which is what we do typically when we're in operation," Culp said. "We're at a very unique point where no other plant has been before, where we can and we have taken the time to do things that, one, would not be practical to do when the plant's online, because typically when you go into an outage, you try to get the plant back online after 30 days. We're not in that position right now, so we have taken advantage of the time to do investments, to do cleaning and repair activities and upgrades that normally we would not get to, if you were in a crunched 30-day period."

A historic plan

The Palisades plant, which was formerly owned by Entergy, shut down in May of 2022. In June of that same year, Holtec acquired the plant with plans to decommission it.

In the fall of 2022, the U.S. Department of Energy rejected Holtec's initial bid to restart the plant, but the company, with support from the state of Michigan, continued its efforts.

The NRC created the Palisades Restart Panel in 2023 to guide the efforts to review, inspect and determine whether the plant could safely be returned to operation.

In September of 2024, the DOE announced the closing of a loan guarantee for up to $1.52 billion to help finance the restart of the nuclear plant. In addition, the state has given $300 million in grants to the plant for the restart.

"We're trying to make good use of this rare opportunity that plants never get and this is the first time something like this has ever happened in the United States," Culp said. "We were very excited for the day when Palisades is back online, generating electricity, but we're going to make sure that, before we get to that date, that all of our work has been completed and that we're taking advantage of this opportunity."

Along with the restart, Holtec is also working to deploy two next generation small modular reactors to boost the generation capacity at the plant.

In December of 2025, the DOE awarded a $400 million grant to Holtec for the small modular reactors project.

"That money is going to go toward early procurement of major components that will be needed for the manufacturing of those SMRs here in the United States," Culp said.

Culp said they also submitted part one of the construction permit application for the reactors in December to the NRC for approval.

"Assuming that regulatory review is successful, we will be submitting our phase two application," Culp said. "We're also doing site prep work right now. We've done a little bit of clearing in anticipation of those SMRs being constructed at the site."

Along with the preconstruction activities, Culp said they have been doing a lot of environmental work and have a goal to get the two new reactors online by early next decade.

"We are hopeful that they will be the first two small modular reactors in the United States," Culp said. "The two units would add 240 megawatts each, which combined would be 680 megawatts, that would nearly double the site's electrical output."

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

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Lake Michigan is under threat – the dangers are out of sight

By THEODORE J. KARAMANSKI
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

Back in 2014, singer-songwriter Lee Murdock released a song that asked the question: "What about the water?" The song is about the pollution in Lake Erie in the 1960s and '70s. At that time, headlines that Erie was dying helped energize across the Great Lakes region an environmental movement that forced a national commitment to clean up the lakes.

The Clean Water Act of 1972 ushered in an era of federal activism that did much to restore all of the Great Lakes. More than half a century later, the Great Lakes have again reached an inflection point. People in cities such as Chicago and Milwaukee, which draw their very life from Lake Michigan, need to again ask themselves: What about the water?

The environmental threats to Lake Michigan are less obvious than the images that spurred public action in the past. In the summer of 1967, Chicago's lakefront was fouled by millions of dead fish. The Chicago Park District dispatched crews to clear the beaches and ran out of places to put the foul flotsam. Billions of the alewives, a small silvery invasive fish, died that summer and awoke citizens to the fact that something was wrong with the region's greatest natural resource. Out of that awakening came important measures to counteract giant algae blooms by stopping the use of phosphates in dishwashing liquid and other household items. Chicago's Deep Tunnel and Reservoir Plan to reduce the discharge of street and municipal sewage into the lake received billions of federal dollars.

Today, Lake Michigan is not sending up a warning flag as obvious as miles of dead fish. The threats to our waters are insidiously obscured from sight. Most days, a trip to the beach yields beautifully clear water. The water is actually unnaturally clear because more than 400 trillion invasive Black Sea quagga mussels have taken over the bottom of the lake. Their constant filtering of water for food, about a liter a day, has made the water clearer but also has removed much of the phytoplankton, single-celled organisms, and zooplankton, tiny aquatic organisms, in the lake. In doing so the mussels eliminate the base of the lake food chain, the sustenance for young and small fish.

The result is that whitefish, once the most abundant fish in the lake, are near expiration. At the same time, the remarkably clear water results in localized blooms of Cladophora, a weed-like algae, and Microcystis, a poisonous blue-green bacteria. Phosphate fertilizer that runs off farm fields is a wonder food for algae. Together, they are a long-term threat to the health of beaches and urban water supplies.

Another invisible threat to the lake and public health is microplastics. This petrochemical product is ubiquitous in modern life, from cosmetics to food packaging. As it has become part of daily life for the millions of residents in the region, it has also become an increasing part of the Great Lakes. Plastic in streams, rivers and household water makes its way into the lake and from there into our bodies. It has been estimated that each week we ingest about a credit card-sized amount of plastic.

Another unregulated biology experiment that is underway is the unknown impact of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS. We have used these compounds for more than a generation to make fabrics, furniture and firefighting foam, among other products. PFAS have been dubbed "forever chemicals" because they degrade very slowly and are carried widely via air and water. Maybe the only way to combat this toxic pollutant is by consumer boycott, the way we eliminated phosphates in household cleaners in the 1970s.

As residents of the Great Lakes region, we are caretakers of 21 percent of the world's most precious resource: freshwater. At a time when Americans may feel beset with crises at home and abroad, we nevertheless must once again ask ourselves: What about the water?

Theodore J. Karamanski is an emeritus professor at Loyola University Chicago and author of the new book "Great Lake: An Unnatural History of Lake Michigan." He wrote this for the Chicago Tribune.

Michigan House OKs 'fertility fraud' bills in response to donor deception

By BETH LEBLANC
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING — The Michigan House voted Wednesday to approve a package of bills that would make it illegal for assisted reproduction doctors to submit donor sperm or eggs that differ from what an in vitro fertilization patient requests.

The five-bill "fertility fraud" package, first introduced in 2021, would prohibit donors from providing false information about their medical or personal history as well as attempt to stop health professionals from using an embryo, sperm or egg that is different from the one requested by their client.

Michigan does not currently have laws to punish a doctor for lying about a sperm donor or using his own, even amid a couple of high-profile cases in which doctors in Michigan and elsewhere used their own sperm to impregnate patients.

Most of the five-bill package passed largely along party lines in the Republican-led House, with support from a handful of Democrats.

State Rep. John Roth, R-Interlochen, who has been working on the package of bills for about five years, said he is hopeful about the legislation's chances in the Senate.

The statutory framework is sorely needed to ensure integrity in the fertility industry, where abuses have been publicized in recent years, Roth said.

"There is no criminal penalty, no accountability, no justice for the people whose lives have been forever altered," Roth said from the House floor Wednesday. "Women turn to fertility specialists in moments of deep vulnerability, courage and hope. When they ask for help, they deserve honesty. They deserve medical integrity. They deserve the truth."

State Rep. Laurie Pohutsky, D-Livonia, said she opposed the legislation in part because it asks otherwise well-meaning donors to vouch for information and family histories of which they may not have knowledge.

The legislation increases liability for donors and may lead to fewer egg and sperm donations in the future, Pohutsky said.

"I understand the necessity of dealing with fertility fraud," Pohutsky said. "But this (legislative) package goes really far beyond that and creates liability, where the person who is potentially being held liable doesn't really have a reasonable expectation of knowing everything that these bills would require them to know."

Roth has argued the legislation is careful to crack down only on donors or doctors who "knowingly" present false information.

The legislation was in part inspired by one of Roth's constituents, who learned through genetic testing that her mother's fertility doctor used his own sperm to impregnate her without her knowledge. The southeast Michigan obstetrician and gynecologist, Dr. Philip Peven, is now deceased, but previously admitted to using his own sperm instead of a designated donor because he knew it was "viable."

The bills passed by the House on Wednesday would make it a felony to knowingly engage in an activity that provides false or misleading information related to assisted reproduction, making it punishable by up to five years in prison and/or a $50,000 fine. The false information that could be prosecuted under the bill would include information related to the embryo or gamete used or the identity or medical or social history of a donor.

Health professionals who used an embryo or gamete, including their own, that wasn't designated by the patient would face up to 15 years in prison or a $100,000 fine.

The bill also specifies that the felonies would carry a 15-year statute of limitations within which charges would have to be filed. That 15-year window would start when an individual discovered evidence of the fraud.

The legislation also opens the window to civil litigation based on false representations related to assisted reproduction. It allows a parent or child injured by the false representation to sue for punitive and economic and non-economic damages as well as attorney fees and costs. The lawsuit would have to be filed within three years of an individual discovering the false representation.

The legislation also would allow and in some cases require the state Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs to take disciplinary action against a physician accused of having made false representations in assisted reproduction cases.

LIFEGUARDS

From page A1

plan for the development.

City council introduced an ordinance to amend the Trailside/Everett Park Phase II PUD for the properties 900 and 1070 Indiana Ave.

There are currently 24, two-family condominium units that are being built on the site and the amendment will add 32 additional units.

City council also introduced an ordinance to amend the zoning map to rezone the properties 706 and 712 Virginia Ave. to PUD.

Planning and Zoning Administrator Kelly Getman-Dissette said the preliminary site plan is to develop a site condominium with six single-family residential lots.

The ordinances will be brought back for a second reading and possible adoption at a future meeting.

Other items

City council approved a six-month moratorium on approvals for private roads.

"We've had some inquiries about private roads, we have no pending applications for one, but we don't really have any standards for private roads," Hosier said.

The moratorium would allow the city to develop regulations and standards for private roads and be ready for any future application submissions.

City council approved an amendment that stems from a request from Dwelling Place and allows for the city to enter into payment in lieu of taxes agreement by resolution. The agreement is a requirement for the application for funding from Michigan State Housing Development Authority.

City council approved three special events including:

■ South Haven Jazz Festival 2026 to be held from 4 to 10 p.m. on Sept. 18-19 at the Huron Street Pavilion and Dyckman Park.

■ Ice Breaker Festival 2027, to be held from Feb. 5-7 at various locations throughout the city.

■ Harborfest 2026 to be held from June 18-20 at various locations throughout the city.

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

MSHDA
MICHIGAN STATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

NOTICE OF INTENT TO REQUEST RELEASE OF FUNDS FOR TIERED PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

Date of Publication: Sunday, February 22
Michigan State Housing Development Authority
735 East Michigan Avenue
Lansing, MI 48912
517-335-2524

On or after *March 3* **the** Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) **will submit a request to the** *HUD Office of Community Planning and Development* **for the release of federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds under** Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (Pub. L. 93-383), as amended, to undertake the following project:

Tier 1 Broad Review Project/Program Title: Five Year Environmental Review for MSHDA CDBG-Funded Homeowner Rehabilitation
Purpose: MSHDA will provide units of local government with funds to provide homeowners, within their jurisdictions, earning at or below 80% of the area median income with assistance for essential home repairs.
Location: The program will service single family homes within Van Buren, Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Branch Counties.
Project/Program Description: The CDBG Homeowner Rehabilitation Program aims to improve quality of life for local residents by funding essential home repairs for properties occupied by households earning at or below 80% of the area median income. All repairs must: be eligible under CDBG guidelines as defined in the MSHDA CDBG Policy Manual; comply with local building codes; and meet the MSHDA Housing Rehabilitation Standards.

Tier 2 site specific reviews will be completed for those laws and authorities not addressed in the Tier 1 broad review for each address under this program when addresses become known.
Level of Environmental Review Citation: *24 CFR Part 58.35(a)(3)(i)*

Tier 2 Site Specific Review: The site specific reviews will cover the following laws and authorities not addressed in the Tier 1 broad review: Flood Insurance [Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973 and National Flood Insurance Reform Act of 1994 [42 USC 4001-4128 and 42 USC 5154a]]; Coastal Zone Management Act, sections 307(c) & (d); Contamination and Toxic Substances [24 CFR Part 50.3(i) & 58.5(i)(2)]; Endangered Species Act of 1973, particularly section 7; 50 CFR Part 402; Floodplain Management [Executive Order 11988, particularly section 2(a); 24 CFR Part 55]; Historic Preservation [National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, particularly sections 106 and 110; 36 CFR Part 800]; Noise Abatement and Control [Noise Control Act of 1972, as amended by the Quiet Communities Act of 1978; 24 CFR Part 51 Subpart B].

Mitigation Measures/Conditions/Permits (if any):

- **Flood Insurance:** If a home is in a FEMA designated Special Flood Hazard Area, it will undergo further evaluation if flood insurance is required for the property or if the property is not eligible for program assistance.
- **Coastal Zone Management:** If a home is located in a coastal zone, the grantee will consult with the state coastal commission to determine if project activities are subject to state review. The grantee will obtain a federal consistency determination from the state coastal commission detailing any necessary mitigation.
- **Contamination and Toxic Substances:** The grantee will review publicly available records such as the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy's (EGLE) Remediation Information Data Exchange (RIDE) database, EPA Superfund National Priorities, and CERCLA List. If evidence of contamination at the property is identified the contamination shall be mitigated or remediated under the guidance of the appropriate state agency. For homes constructed prior to 1978, the home will undergo the appropriate lead-based paint evaluation and be subject to appropriate mitigation measures to reach compliance with the HUD Lead Safe Housing Rule. An asbestos inspection will be completed in areas where renovation activities are planned. If asbestos is identified, mitigation measures will be developed to be in compliance with the National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAP) and Occupational Safety and Health Ad ministration (OSHA).
- **Endangered Species:** For properties which the project activities include roofing, landscaping, or hazardous tree removal, grantees will review the endangered species listed in their area and consult with FWS if the project actions will adversely affect them.
- **Floodplain Management:** If the project occurs in a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard (FFRMS) floodplain, the grantee must work with a floodplain specialist to determine whether the 8-step decision-making process, the 5-step decision making process, or neither process applies to be in compliance with this Executive Order.
- **Historic Preservation:** A Section 106 review must be completed to determine the potential effect on historic properties. If the project is determined to have adverse of effect on historic properties, consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects. If adverse effects cannot be mitigated, the applicable party may be removed from the project.
- **Noise Abatement and Control:** If a preliminary screening identifies potential noise generators in the vicinity of the home a noise assessment will occur. If the noise assessment documents an unacceptable noise exposure, mitigation measures will be implemented to eliminate the adverse noise impacts.

Estimated Project Cost: $7,026,000.00

The activity/activities proposed are categorically excluded under HUD regulations at 24 CFR Part 58 from National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements per *24 CFR Part 58.35(a)(3)(i)***. An Environmental Review Record (ERR) that documents the environmental determinations for this project is on file at** MSHDA's Lansing and Detroit offices (735 E Michigan Ave, Lansing, MI 48912 and 3028 W Grand Blvd, Detroit, MI 48202) **and maybe examined or copied weekdays 8A.M to 5P.M.**

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Any individual, group, or agency may submit written comments on the ERR to the MSHDA *Neighborhood Development Division***. All comments received by** *March 2* **will be considered by the** *MSHDA* **prior to authorizing submission of a request for release of funds.**

ENVIRONMENTAL CERTIFICATION

MSHDA certifies to *HUD* **that** *Anthony Lentych***, Certifying Officer, in** *his* **capacity as** *Chief Housing Investment Officer* **consents to accept the jurisdiction of the Federal Courts if an action is brought to enforce responsibilities in relation to the environmental review process and that these responsibilities have been satisfied.** *HUD's* **approval of the certification satisfies its responsibilities under NEPA and related laws and authorities and allows the** *regional housing partnerships in MSHDA's region J* **to use HUD program funds.**

OBJECTIONS TO RELEASE OF FUNDS

HUD **will accept objections to its release of fund and the** *MSHDA* **certification for a period of fifteen days following the anticipated submission date or its actual receipt of the request (whichever is later) only if they are on one of the following bases: (a) the certification was not executed by the Certifying Officer of the** *MSHDA***; (b) the** *MSHDA* **has omitted a step or failed to make a decision or finding required by HUD regulations at 24 CFR part 58; (c) the grant recipient or other participants in the development process have committed funds, incurred costs or undertaken activities not authorized by 24 CFR Part 58 before approval of a release of funds by** *HUD***; or (d) another Federal agency acting pursuant to 40 CFR Part 1504 has submitted a written finding that the project is unsatisfactory from the standpoint of environmental quality. Objections must be prepared and submitted in accordance with the required procedures (24 CFR Part 58, Sec. 58.76) and shall be addressed to** *HUD* **at** *477 Michigan Avenue, 16th Floor Detroit, Michigan 48226-2592***. Potential objectors should contact** *HUD* **to verify the actual last day of the objection period.**

Anthony Lentych, Chief Housing Investment Officer, Certifying Officer

South Haven Tribune

CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Desk: 1-855-317-4292

Hours: Monday - Friday 9am-2pm EST

monster

0100 ANNOUNCEMENTS

WE BUY JUNK CARS!
DAMAGED? TOTALED?
BROKEN? NOT RUNNING?
WRECKED?

CALL 269-500-1711

0200 EMPLOYMENT

The City of South Haven is seeking a qualified **IT Operations Manager** to oversee daily IT operations and service delivery. Responsibilities include ensuring reliable and secure systems, supervising IT staff, implementing IT Director strategies, and serving as the primary escalation point, including after-hours support. Must have bachelor's degree in information technology, computer science, or a related field. 5 plus years of IT operations and leadership experience with strong knowledge of infrastructure, networking, system administration, and cybersecurity. Experience in compliance, project management, and effective communication required. Candidates may apply online at www.southhavenmi.gov. The City of South Haven is an Equal Opportunity Employer who places a high value on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

0900 LEGALS

City of Bangor Board of Review Organizational Meeting, Tuesday March 3rd at 8:30 am

Appeal Hearings - Monday, March 9th 2-5pm and 6-9pm
Tuesday, March 10th 9am-Noon
Friday, March 13th 9am-Noon

Letters must be received by 4pm March 12th.

Ratios:
Commercial- 45.11% 1.1084
Industrial- 49.11% 1.0181
Residential- 44.92% 1.1130
any others previously listed should be at 50% 1.0000

NOTICE OF MARCH BOARD OF REVIEW

The South Haven Township Board of Review will meet at the South Haven Township Hall, 09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy, South Haven, MI 49090, on the following dates and times to review property assessments and hear appeals:

Organizational Meeting (No appeals will be heard at this meeting): Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 2:00 p.m.

Appeal Hearings:
Monday, March 9
* 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
* 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Thursday, March 12
* 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
* 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

This meeting provides taxpayers the opportunity to review their property assessments and present appeals to the Board of Review. Taxpayers who are unable to attend in person should contact the Township Office for information on alternate appeal options.

For additional information, contact:
Don Jollay, MAAO
Assessor, South Haven Twp
Office: 269-637-3305
Cell: 815-546-8288
assessor@southhaventwpmi.gov

MAKE SOME MONEY

IN THE CLASSIFIEDS TODAY!

0900 LEGALS

Notice - 2026 Geneva Township Board of Review will meet: Monday, March 9, 2026 9am to 3pm; Thursday, March 12, 20266 pm to 9 pm, Saturday March 14, 9am to Noon. At the Geneva Township Hall, 62127 CR 380, Bangor Appeals by letter or agent to Geneva Township Supervisor, Nancy Ann Whaley, 63133 16th Avenue, Bangor, MI 49013.. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids/services call 269-427-7607

People DO Read Small Ads. You Did!

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
Senior Services of Van Buren County ("SSVBC") and South Haven Charter Township, in joint ownership are issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Development Services to develop a parcel of land, approximately 1.3 acres, located at 08729 M 140, South Haven, MI into new affordable housing for seniors. The property is currently owned by SSVBC. Proposals are being requested from interested experienced development partners that would develop the land as affordable housing for seniors. Proposals are due electronically to SSVBC by 5pm on March 12, 2026, please visit South Haven Charter Township's website at https://southhaventwp.com to view the RFP for more detail or in person at the Township Office or Senior Services of Van Buren County South Haven office for detailed information:
South Haven Charter Township Hall
09761 Blue Star Memorial Hwy South Haven, MI 49090
Senior Services of Van Buren County
8337 M-140, South Haven, MI 49090

Meeting Synopsis Casco Township Board Meeting Monday, February 16th, 7:00 PM
CALL TO ORDER: Overhiser called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and led in the Pledge of Allegiance.
PRESENT:
Overhiser, Ridley, Campbell & Fleming.
ABSENT: Clevenger
ITEMS APPROVED: Short-Term Rental Fee Increase
Senior Millage Resolution
Parks Millage Renewal
Road Millage Renewal
Bendzinksi Proposal
Eagleview Contract with Allegan County
Allegan County Community Foundation Agreement
Cemetery Fee Amendment
Reception/Building Department Assistant Position
Furniture Budget for Renovated Space
ADJOURNMENT: 9:18 PM
Allan Overhiser, Casco Supervisor, Rachel Ridley, Casco Clerk

CASCO TOWNSHIP 2026 BOARD OF REVIEW NOTICE
Assessor's Office Casco Township 7104 107th Ave
South Haven MI 49090
BOARD OF REVIEW MEETING SCHEDULE

The Casco Township **BOARD OF REVIEW** for 2026 will be held at the Casco Township Hall, 7104 107th Ave, South Haven Michigan on the following dates and times:
ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING: (No appeals will be heard at this meeting) Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.
APPEAL HEARINGS:
Wed, March 11, 2026, from 9:00a. to 4:00p. (Closed Noon-1p.)
Thurs, March 12, 2026, from 2:00p. to 9:00p. (Closed 5-6p.)
***PLEASE NOTE—Appointments** are encouraged for the Board of Review meetings. To schedule an appointment call Kelly Jellison at 269-591-0289 or email kelly@assessingsolutions.com. A **resident** may protest to the Board of Review by letter. Letter appeals are to be accompanied by a completed Board of Review petition form (form L-4035). All letters of protest must be received by 5:00 p.m., Friday, March 6, 2026. The tentative ratios and the estimated multipliers for each class of real property and personal property for 2026 are as follows:
Agriculture…….44.63…1.12032 **Commercial**……48.82……1.02417
Industrial……34.46….1.45096 **Residential**…… 43.70……1.14416
Personal Property….50.00…..1.0000

Assessor Contact Information:
Kelly Jellison, Casco Township Assessor
Dated: January 30, 2026
(269)591-0289, kelly@assessingsolutions.com

2026 BOARD OF REVIEW HEARINGS
CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN, MICHIGAN

The City of South Haven 2026 Board of Review will be in session in the City Council Chambers at City Hall, 539 Phoenix Street, according to the following schedule:

- Tuesday, March 3rd. 9:00 a.m. for Board Organization and review of assessment roll. (No hearing of appeals)
- Tuesday, March 10th. 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon, and 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. hearing of appeals by scheduled appointment. Walk-ins will be seen if time allows between scheduled appointments.
- Thursday, March 12th. 3:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m., hearing of appeals by appointment. Walk-ins will be seen if time allows between scheduled appointments.

Additional sessions may be scheduled by the board if deemed necessary. Appeals may be made by appointment or walk-ins, in person; by an authorized representative; or in writing if received by Thursday, March 12th no later than 5:00 p.m.

Further information may be obtained from the City of South haven Assessor's office, 539 Phoenix St., South Haven, MI 49090 (269) 637-0745.

2026 Van Buren County – City of South Haven

Property Class	Tentative Ratio	Estimated Multiplier
Agricultural	None Classed	None Classed
Commercial	37.84%	1.32135
Industrial	51.14%	0.97771
Residential	47.92%	1.04341
Personal	50.00%	1.00000

2026 Allegan County – City of South Haven

Property Class	Tentative Ratio	Estimated Multiplier
Residential	47.92%	1.04341

THE SOUTH HAVEN CITY HALL IS BARRIER FREE AND THE CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN WILL PROVIDE THE NECESSARY REASONABLE AUXILIARY AIDS AND SERVICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, SUCH AS SIGNERS FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED AND AUDIO TAPES OF PRINTED MATERIALS BEING CONSIDERED AT THE MEETING TO INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITIES AT THE MEETING UPON SEVEN (7) DAYS NOTICE TO THE SOUTH HAVEN CITY CLERK. INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES REQUIRING SERVICES SHOULD CONTACT THE CITY CLERK BY WRITING OR CALL THE SOUTH HAVEN CITY HALL.

RESERVE THIS SPACE TODAY!

SHOUT IT!

OUT LOUD!

IN THE CLASSIFIEDS!

The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed The Chalkboard Kitchen as a new member.

Photos provided

The restaurant previously known as Phoenix Street on Broadway is under new ownership and is now The Chalkboard Kitchen.

Under new ownership, The Chalkboard Kitchen is featuring a new menu.

The Chalkboard Kitchen offers dinning for breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as catering options.

Phoenix Street on Broadway under new ownership

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce recently welcomed The Chalkboard Kitchen as a new member.

According to a news release, the chamber of commerce hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony to not only welcome the business, but to celebrate the restaurant's new ownership.

"The Chalkboard Kitchen marks an exciting new chapter with refreshed leadership, renewed energy and an updated culinary vision," the release stated. "The restaurant continues its tradition of serving guests in the heart of downtown while introducing a creative, evolving menu designed to keep things fresh and flavorful."

The location was previously known as Phoenix Street on Broadway.

"The Chalkboard Kitchen embraces a philosophy centered on high-quality ingredients, thoughtful preparation and a welcoming atmosphere for breakfast, lunch and dinner guests," the release stated.

Along with a new look and ownership, The Chalkboard Kitchen has a new menu.

"The refreshed menu reflects a commitment to both comfort and creativity, offering familiar favorites alongside new and rotating selections," the release stated.

In addition to daily dining service, The Chalkboard Kitchen offers catering and private event options.

"The South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce is proud to support The Chalkboard Kitchen in this new chapter and looks forward to their continued success," the release stated.

Culver's partners with Flywheelers Museum for fundraiser

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — South Haven community members have an opportunity to support local history as Culver's of South Haven teams up with the Michigan Flywheelers Museum for a special benefit night.

According to a news release, the fundraiser will take place from 5 to 8 p.m. on March 4 to raise funds for the museum's $100,000 Challenge Grant.

Culver's, located at 4387 Cecilia Dr., will donate a portion of all sales directly to the museum's grant.

The museum was recently awarded a $100,000 Challenge Grant, which serves as a "match" to jumpstart the construction of a brand-new museum entrance which will include a ticket booth and gift shop. This project represents phase one of a new entrance designed to modernize the visitor experience.

"This grant is a huge milestone for us, but we can only unlock its full potential with the community's help," Museum President Patrick Ingalls said in the release. "Partnering with Culver's allows our supporters to contribute to the future of the museum just by enjoying a meal with their families and friends."

Museum members will be on hand to deliver food to guests both in the dining room and at curbside pick-up.Both dine-in and takeout orders are eligible for the fundraiser.

An information table will be set up inside the restaurant featuring membership applications and more information on the project.

Community members interesting in supporting to fundraiser but are unable to attend the event can send donations via mail to MFM, 64958 M43, Bangor MI 49013 or online via the museum's website www.michiganflywheelers.org.

For more information, contact 269-639-2010 or michiganflywheelers@yahoo.com.

Photo provided

Excavation began last fall for a new entrance to the Michigan Flywheelers Museum which will include a new ticket booth, gift shop and modern restrooms.

County board mourns loss of commissioner

Peat, 78, known as 'hard worker,' passion for development

By JULIE NEWELL
SH Tribune Editor

PAW PAW — Van Buren County Commissioner Randall Lee Peat passed away Feb. 9 at the age of 78.

Peat was first elected in 2018 to the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners and served as chairman of the board for the past several years.

"He was very good to work with," Van Buren County Commissioner Gail Patterson-Gladney said. "We're going to really miss him. I thought he was very good for the county ... he was a hard worker."

In addition to the county board, Peat served on numerous boards and commissions, including the Van Buren Cass Health Department, Van Buren Veteran Services Committee, Van Buren County 911 Board, the Economic Development Commission, Market One Board, the Paw Paw Township Planning Commission and the Board of Directors for Kinexus Group.

"He was really big into economic development," Van Buren County Commissioner Kurt Doroh said. "That was the main thing with Market One in Van Buren and Cass (counties), he was kind of responsible for starting that and getting that going."

Doroh is currently serving as chairman on the board after Peat decided to step down and not seek reelection due to health issues.

"He was the kind of guy that some people don't agree with you, that's it, well we could agree to disagree and still be friends and still work together," Doroh said.

Peat, who was born in Chicago in 1948, at the age of 4, moved with his family to Paw Paw.

He attended Western Michigan University and served in the U.S. Navy where he went through S.E.R.E. (Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape) training which is normally reserved for pilots and special forces, before being deployed to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam. There, he served as a head gunner's mate on an armored troop carrier, ATC, where he and six other men transported Army personnel to their missions. Together, they saw more than 50 combat firefights.

After being released from service, Peat co-founded the international software company Manatron, Inc. with his childhood friend, Ron Stoynoff, and his brother.

"He was very smart, knew a lot about computers and such and he had big dreams for the county, that's for sure," Doroh said. "He'll be missed."

Contact: jnewell@southhaventribune.com, 269-637-1104

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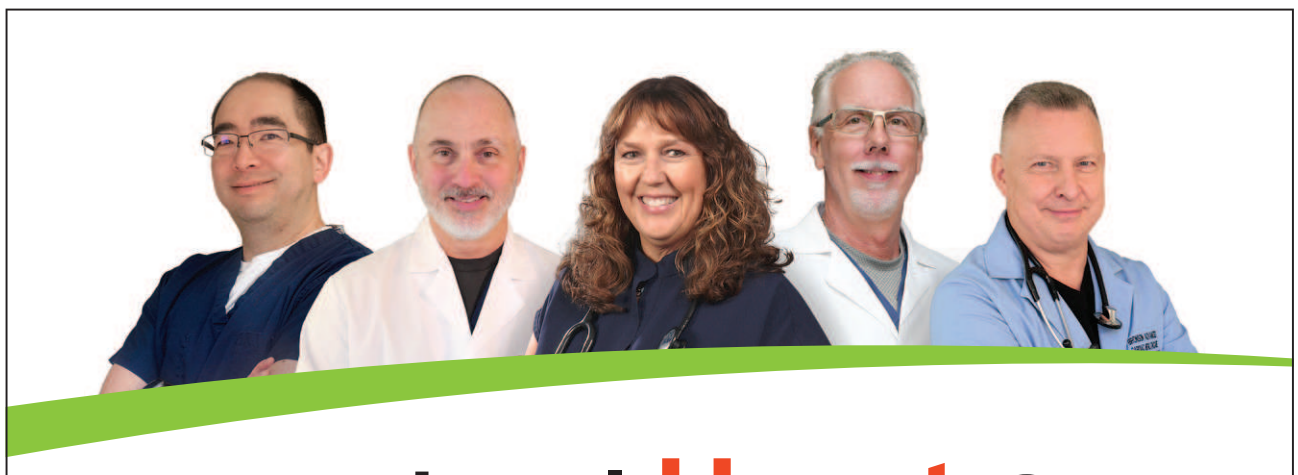

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Y0056_400040021900_M CMS-accepted 09242018 ©2019 Priority Health 11003M8 11/19

Photo provided / South Haven Area Emergency Services

Firefighters work to extinguish a house fire Tuesday night along Main Street in Bangor.

No one injured in Bangor house fire

By TRIBUNE STAFF

BANGOR — Multiple firefighters were called for a Bangor house fire Tuesday night, which was unoccupied at the time.

According to a news release, a mutual aid alarm was sent out at 8:05 p.m. Tuesday for firefighters from the Bangor Community Fire Department, Columbia Township Fire Department and South Haven Area Emergency Services, who responded to a structure fire on Main Street in Bangor.

The fire was quickly controlled, although firefighters were hampered in their efforts by a large amount of clothing stored in a room at the back of the house.

The house was not occupied and no injuries were reported by authorities.

Lakeshore Habitat program to help low-income homeowners

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — Low-and-moderate income homeowners in South Haven can now apply for Lakeshore Habitat for Humanity's Home Repair Program.

According to a news release, a grant from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority has $500,000 in funds available through this program for the City of South Haven and South Haven Township this year.

"Lakeshore Habitat for Humanity helps families remain safely and securely in their homes through its Home Repair Program, which assists low-and-moderate-income homeowners with critical home repairs," the release stated.

The Home Repair Program is designed to prevent displacement and help homeowners maintain safe, warm and accessible living environments.

Eligible repairs include: roofing, heating and cooling, siding, electrical issues, plumbing hazards, ramps, railings, grab bars and repairing unsecured entries.

"By utilizing a variety of funding sources, Lakeshore Habitat for Humanity is able to provide repairs at a significantly lower cost than traditional contracted labor and in many cases, at no cost to eligible homeowners," the release stated.

Separate funds are also available for parts of Allegan and Ottawa counties.

"Our Home Repair Program helps homeowners address critical issues that they might not be able to afford otherwise," Home Repair Program Manager James Royster said in the release. "We help families stay in their existing homes, which is often the most affordable housing option there is."

To qualify, homeowners must reside in one of the following service areas: City of Allegan, city and township of Holland or Zeeland, or city and township of South Haven.

Applicants must also meet income guidelines, with household income falling under 80 percent of the area median income for their county.

Additional eligibility requirements include:

- The home must be owner-occupied
- The home must be a non-mobile home
- The program cannot be used for rental properties

Interested homeowners can apply online at lakeshorehabitat.org/home-repair-program.

For more information email homerepair@lakeshorehabitat.org or call 616-393-8001, ext. 110.

SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays through May 26, 2026.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: "Over and Under the Snow" by Kate Messner and Christopher Silas Neal StoryWalk available from Jan. 1 to Feb. 28. Call to schedule an appointment.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

Bridge: Chicago Scoring at 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Bridge: Duplicate Scoring at 1 p.m. on Wednesdays at the South Haven Memorial Library.

Michigan Maritime Museum: free admission on the first Sunday of every month from November through April.

First United Methodist Church: Free meals every Tuesday night. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Meal is served at 6 p.m.

February

24 – Brookside Farms: Meet and greet with Van Buren County District Court Judge candidate Rachel Keeley from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.

24 – Basketball: Girls freshman team against St. Joseph High School at 4 p.m. at South Haven High School.

24 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity team against Watervliet High School at 5:30 p.m. at South Haven High School.

24 – Basketball: Girls varsity team against Watervliet High School at 7 p.m. at South Haven High School.

24 – Rotary Club: Morning meeting – SHAES Chief Brandon Hinz to present SHAES 2025 review and updates.

24 – South Haven Area Young Professionals: Coffee Connections from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. at The Flying Saucer.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

25 – Michigan Maritime Museum: Lecture Series featuring Valerie van Heest with a "History of the Great Lakes in 12 Shipwrecks at 6:30 p.m. $10 for non-members, free for museum members.

26 – Basketball: Girls freshman team against Hasting High School at 4 p.m. at South Haven High School.

26 – Basketball: Girls junior varsity team against Berrien Springs High School at 5:30 p.m. at South Haven High School.

26 – Basketball: Girls varsity team against Berrien Springs High School at 7 p.m. at South Haven High School.

27 – Swimming: Boys varsity championship meet.

27 – South Haven Memorial Library: Parent Cafes from 11 a.m. to noon. Snacks and engaging conversation about self-care, support and community resources. Free event. Kids can enjoy Stuffed Animal Story Time with the library staff during the event.

28 – Job Fair: Hosted by the City of South Haven and South Haven Area Emergency Services from noon to 2 p.m. at City Hall.

28 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club at 11 a.m.

March

3 – Scott Club: Remembering Remarkable Michigan Women at 1 p.m. at First Congregational Church. Attendees are encouraged to wear their own hats in celebration of women's history month.

6 – South Haven Memorial Library: Play-Doh Play Date free event for preschoolers at 11 a.m.

11 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

12 – South Haven Indivisible: Book discussion on "The Flag and the Cross" from 4 to 5 p.m. at the South Haven Memorial Library.

12 – South Haven Area Young Professionals: Monthly networking event from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at South Haven Brewpub

17 – Scott Club: Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with music, Celtics and classics at 1 p.m. at Senior Services.

18 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

19 – South Haven Memorial Library: DIY at the library event to learn how to make homemade sugar scrubs at 4 p.m.

19 – Baseball: Boys Junior Varsity against Michigan Lutheran High School at 4 p.m.

20 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy Play Fridays for preschoolers from 11 a.m. to noon. Wear clothes that can get messy.

21 – South Haven Memorial Library: Free STEM Saturdays event with legos and other rotating STEM activities from 11 a.m. to noon.

23 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity against Three Rivers High School at 4 p.m.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Friends of the South Haven library meeting from 2 to 3 p.m. The public is welcome to attend.

25 – Baseball: Boys junior varsity against Berrien Springs High School at 4 p.m.

25 – South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce: South Haven High School summer job fair.

27 – South Haven Memorial Library: Parent Cafes from 11 a.m. to noon. Snacks and engaging conversation about self-care, support and community resources. Free event. Kids can enjoy Stuffed Animal Story Time with the library staff during the event.

28 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club at 11 a.m.

Al-Van Humane Society
Adopt ♥ Volunteer ♥ Donate ♥ Advocate
73303 8th Ave. PO Box 421 South Haven, MI 49090
phone 269.637.5062 fax 269.639.2242
Mon, Tue, Thurs, Fri 11 am to 5:30 pm; Sat 11 am to 3 pm; Wed, Sun Closed

Meet our Pet of the Week, Lurch!

Lurch is an almost two-year-old Great Dane mix with the perfect mix of big-dog presence and playful, puppy-at-heart energy. He still lights up for toys and thinks fetch is the greatest invention of all time. Sweet, smart, and eager to learn, he thrives on both mental and physical activity and loves being part of whatever his people are doing. With his gentle nature and bouncy charm, Lurch is ready to grow into an incredible lifelong companion. To submit an adoption survey, visit us at al-van.org/adopt!

FUR BALL SILENT AUCTION

Our Fur Ball Silent Auction is officially live. You do not have to attend the event to join the fun. Anyone can browse and bid from anywhere. From unique experiences to fun local favorites and one-of-a-kind finds, there is truly something for everyone. Every bid helps provide care, comfort, and second chances for the pets at Al-Van Humane Society.

Start browsing, place your bids, and let the friendly competition begin. The animals are counting on you. You can participate in the auction by visiting al-van.org/furball.

THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST
Purina dry dog food and puppy food

The South Haven Tribune makes every effort to ensure accuracy in its stories.

If you believe there is an error, please contact the editor of the page on which it occurred. If you are unsure who to contact, call 269-637-1104 to be directed to the appropriate editor.

The Spotlight
A Weekly Guide To Services & Business Around Town.

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Justus Henkes of Team United States competes in the Aspen Snowmass Men's Snowboard Slopestyle Qualifiers during the Toyota U.S. Grand Prix 2026 at Aspen Snowmass Ski Resort on Jan. 8 in Aspen, Colorado.
Michael Reaves / Getty Images / TNS

U.S. ski resorts turn to drones to make it snow amid dire drought

By KYLE STOCK
Bloomberg News (TNS)

Despite a barren start to Colorado's ski season, Winter Park Resort opened on Halloween and served up holiday powder.

The ski area's secret is a contraption a few miles upwind of the chairlifts that looks like a meat smoker strapped to the top of a ladder. When weather conditions are just right, a Winter Park contractor fires up the machine, burning a fine dust of silver iodide into the sky – a process known as cloud seeding. Ideally, the particles disappear into a cloud that is cold enough and wet enough to produce snow, but may need a nudge. The silver iodide becomes the nuclei for water droplets, like iron filings to a magnet. Those droplets freeze and fall from the sky as snowflakes, freshening up the slopes of the resort as it tries to lure the Gore-Tex-clad masses between Denver and larger, showier ski destinations further west.

Doug Laraby, who has helped run Winter Park for nearly four decades, says the resort leaned heavily on its cloud seeding equipment over the Christmas holiday, sprinkling the skies as fresh powder fell days before the critical New Years weekend. At the moment, Winter Park has more snow than Breckenridge, Keystone and a host of bigger resorts nearby.

"For us," Laraby explains, "that was a million-dollar storm."

Resorts are increasingly seeking solutions to freshen up the brown slopes spanning the American West this winter, even as the East Coast grapples with back-to-back storms. Last month, Vail Resorts Inc. – which owns nearly 50 resorts across the U.S. and Canada – said it would miss revenue projections due to subpar snowfall this season. The dramatic lack of precipitation in the Rockies "limited our ability to open terrain" and, in turn, crimped spending by both locals and destination guests, Chief Executive Officer Rob Katz said in a statement.

In a battle to improve – or at least maintain – snowpack in the face of rising temperatures and drought, Winter Park, operated by Vail rival Alterra Mountain Co., is one of a growing number of groups in the American West doubling down on cloud seeding, from state governments and ski hills to utilities and watershed management agencies.

Desperate for water – ideally snow – they're banking on the strategy to buoy the $6 billion U.S. ski industry, while keeping rivers and reservoirs at healthy levels come spring. Despite the promise, though, companies are still trying to amass data showing the technology can actually deliver appreciable amounts of powder. And scientists studying cloud seeding have cast doubt on just how effective it is.

Katja Friedrich, an atmospheric science professor at the University of Colorado, concedes that cloud seeding works in a lab. "But out there," she says, gesturing to cirrus clouds sweeping over the Front Range outside of her office, "it's a totally different business."

Storms are volatile, complex and unforgiving places to gather data. "The application is so far ahead of what the science actually shows," Friedrich explains. "Usually, it's the other way around."

The idea of cloud seeding dates back to the 19th century, and it got an unexpected boost thanks to research at General Electric in the wake of World War II. DRI, a nonprofit research institute in Nevada, started cloud seeding in the 1960s. Putting particles in clouds to create precipitation gained traction in recent years as waves of drought hit the U.S., tallying $14 billion in damages in 2023 alone.

DRI now runs cloud-seeding operations all over the West, including the program at Winter Park. In 2023, the Winter Park generators burned for the equivalent of five straight days, planting an estimated 24 inches of powder on the slopes that wouldn't have been there otherwise, according to DRI. That equates to 13 percent of what would have fallen naturally.

"The main driver [for our clients] is water resources," says Frank McDonough, a DRI research scientist. But, he notes, "we can help the entire mountain economy."

Private companies are also playing a growing role, most notably Rainmaker Technology Corp., a startup that is now the lead cloud seeding contractor for Utah, which has built one of the most aggressive programs in the American West. From a warehouse in Salt Lake City, founder Augustus Doricko, a 25-year-old with a resplendent mullet that belies his Connecticut childhood, manages a crew of 120, mostly young people working to make it snow on mountains they might otherwise be climbing or skiing.

When the weather looks right, Rainmaker crews pile into 12 pickups, each loaded with two drones, and convoy up the canyons of the Wasatch Mountains. They send half of the drones whirring into the soup of clouds and spray silver iodide for about an hour. When the machines come down to recharge, the team launches the second wave. The cycle is repeated until the clouds move on or get too warm.

Doricko says his company is creating a fresh supply of water with no ecological impact; silver iodide is inorganic and even if ingested, won't dissolve in the human body.

This year, the state of Utah will pay Rainmaker $7.5 million, part of a cloud seeding blitz that began three years ago. With the Great Salt Lake at historic low levels, Utah lawmakers approved a tenfold increase in funding, committing at least $5 million a year to operations and another $12 million to upgrade and expand a fleet of almost 200 cloud seeding machines on the ground.

Rainmaker is charged with generating enough snow to help partially refill the lake. The company also has a contract with Snowbird Resort, located to the east of Salt Lake City, and much of its seeding will happen near Powder Mountain and Snowbasin resorts, located further north, although neither ski area is a client.

"Anything we can do to increase water levels is going to be well worth the funding," says Jonathan Jennings, a meteorologist with the Utah Department of Natural Resources.

The list of stakeholders clamoring for more water in the American West is long, ranging from ski resorts to wildfire fighters, reservoir managers to farmers.

"Every state in the West is either cloud seeding or thinking of cloud seeding," says Friedrich, the University of Colorado researcher.

It's also popular, in part, because it's cheap. Jennings estimates that it costs about $30 to produce 325,000 gallons of water, or what experts call an acre-foot of water. Recycling or desalinating a similar amount would cost somewhere around $1,000. Snowmaking, meanwhile, is more expensive and uses more water than it produces.

When Doricko visits potential customers, be they utilities, ski resorts or state agencies, his sales script is simple: "It's the only way you can bring new water supply to the Rocky Mountain West."

More often than not these days, the pitch lands. Idaho has also hired Rainmaker this winter, eager to fill its reservoirs and keep farmers happy. All told, the company has about 100 drones flying across Western skies.

In Colorado, where arid conditions have exacerbated wildfires, officials are curious about the capabilities of Rainmaker's drones while waiting to see this winter's snow tallies from Utah. In the meantime, they're working to replace decades-old, ground-based seeding machines with ones that can be switched on remotely. Without the need of a human to light the burner, the new units can be tucked into more remote places and at higher elevations that are colder for longer, improving the odds for snow.

"We feel comfortable saying we can get an additional eight to 12 percent of precipitation per storm," says Andrew Rickert, a weather modification program manager with the Colorado Water Conservation Board. "And if we have a great winter in Colorado, there are 30 to 35 storms we can seed."

Friedrich isn't so sure about that estimate, despite being regarded as a bit of a rockstar in the cloud seeding field. In 2017, her research team zig-zagged a plane rigged with seed flares through a cloud in Wyoming that wasn't producing snow. Sure enough, snow fell in the same pattern as the flight, results that fueled much of the recent seeding boom.

However, Friedrich points out, there wasn't that much snow. And she notes that much remains unknown, like how wind affects the amount of silver iodide that gets into a cloud, and whether the particles trigger much precipitation beyond what would occur naturally.

"I understand why people are buying it, because they're so desperate," she says. "But if you ask me, there's no scientific proof" that it produces a meaningful amount of water. Friedrich is working on a new study to try to figure out how effective ground-based cloud seeding can be and the best operating conditions.

Cloud seeding has also faced pushback from conspiracy theorists who say it works too well. Despite no evidence, Rainmaker was inaccurately implicated in last summer's deadly Texas floods, and bills to ban weather modification have been filed in dozens of statehouses across the U.S., including those of Colorado and Utah. Former Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene also introduced a federal cloud-seeding ban in Congress in the wake of last July's floods.

Doricko, at Rainmaker, has been working to convince lawmakers that cloud seeding does no harm and, on the other front, win over skeptical scientists like Freidrich. Rainmaker spent much of the spring and summer building its own radar system and deploying a layer of on-the-ground weather stations to measure results. It's also working with independent researchers to provided peer-reviewed validation. As Friedrich did years ago, Rainmaker tries to spray silver-iodide in zig-zag patterns, so its results are more visible on radar – a so-called "seeding signature."

Doricko acknowledges the challenge of teasing out the exact influence of man-made cloud seeding – which he jokingly refers to as "magic beans" – from natural precipitation. "Our fundamental research on now at Rainmaker is all about what kitchen sink of sensors can we throw at this problem to actually validate" our work, he says.

Vail abandoned its cloud seeding program in 2020, shifting its resources to invest heavily in machines that use water to spray artificial snow. The newest snow guns monitor weather in real time and can be programmed remotely.

"This technology means that Vail can make the most of every moment that conditions allow for snowmaking," says spokeswoman Michelle Dallal. Still, the resort is feeling the pinch of an abnormally dry winter.

State officials are trying to get Vail back on board. Cloud seeding, they argue, can be cheaper than snowmaking, both in terms of cost and carbon, and it adds water to the ecosystem, rather than taking a share of it away. The state is also trying to get other ski areas to buy in: This year, Colorado positioned a ground system to seed clouds on the slopes of Aspen, in hopes that the resort will help fund future programs.

Meanwhile, Winter Park has emerged as one of the state's biggest cloud seeding cheerleaders. Laraby says only 10 percent of the mountain is covered by snowmaking gear, and there are no plans to install more. And yet, when the storms rolled through the state Dec. 28, Winter Park says its cloud-seeding efforts conjured 12 inches of snow, triple what fell on Vail.

"If you ask me, it enhances the efficiency of these storms," Laraby says. "I think it's awesome."

FOCUS

Terrence Antonio James / Chicago Tribune / TNS

Aziza Butler, a homeschooling advocate and former Chicago Public Schools teacher, on Feb. 5, 2026, at WeSchool, a religious microschool she runs in a church building in South Holland.

'Free the kids'

Why more Chicago families are turning to homeschooling

By KATE ARMANINI
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

CHICAGO — Inside an Irving Park bungalow, kids raced barefoot through the dining room, zooming past paper chains taped to the ceiling. Some slouched in couch chairs, trading stories in a game of Dungeons & Dragons. Others lay on the hardwood floor, flipping through picture books.

Teacher Claire Jakubiszyn knelt beside a 7-year-old boy, counting beads for an art project.

"This is how, even though we don't do math class, we're incorporating it through hands-on practice," she said.

Jakubiszyn's microschool – or "unschool," as she calls it – enrolls nearly two dozen students, ages 4 to 14. There are no desks, no tests, no set curriculum, just a small group of teachers to facilitate child-led learning. Most of the kids are homeschoolers who attend part time.

"Children aren't standard, right? Education shouldn't be standard. Different kids are going to need different things," said Jakubiszyn, a former high school arts teacher at a Chicago charter school.

The model may seem unconventional, but it's gaining ground.

The pandemic supercharged interest in alternative education, from microschools, to homeschooling co-ops, to online learning. Years later, many of those kids haven't returned to traditional classrooms.

Against the backdrop of national debates over school choice and vouchers, homeschooling has burst from the ideological fringe to the center of Chicago's education landscape.

Illinois is among a handful of states with virtually no data on homeschooling. But among the 30 states that track participation, the numbers are booming. Last school year, homeschooling rose by about 5 percent, nearly triple the pre-pandemic growth rate, according to the Homeschool Research Lab at Johns Hopkins University.

Jakubiszyn began homeschooling in 2022. Her daughter was increasingly unhappy in kindergarten at a public magnet school, where crammed classrooms and rigid schedules seemed to stifle her curiosity, Jakubiszyn said.

During the pandemic, the family had run a small learning pod. Why not revive the model? That same year, Jakubiszyn opened Blazing Star School on the second floor of her yellow-brick home. Today, it has a waitlist.

Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune / TNS

Claire Jakubiszyn, director and founder of Blazing Star School, works with students on pen and ink impressions on Feb. 5. Blazing Star is a microschool in Chicago, enrolling almost two dozen children, ages 5 to 14.

"I knew that we couldn't just be homeschoolers. We would have driven each other nuts," Jakubiszyn said. "I was like, 'We need more people. We need a whole community.'"

Modern homeschooling has shifted from a largely religious, rural demographic to a more diverse, often secular population, according to Angela Watson, assistant professor and director of the Homeschool Research Lab at Johns Hopkins. It is the fastest-growing – and the only growing – form of education in the U.S.

That shift is unfolding as enrollment falls in large, urban districts, including at Chicago Public Schools. Most of the decline is due to population changes: Birth rates are dropping. Black families are leaving the city in droves. But a growing share of families are also seeking alternatives to public schools.

From 2018 to 2023, the percentage of Chicago's school-aged children enrolled in CPS fell from 75 percent to 71 percent, according to a recent report. The proportion attending private schools or not enrolled ticked up over the same period.

"Homeschooling is not only holding its own, which is a win when everyone else is going down, but it's actually increasing," Watson said. "We saw huge increases during the pandemic. Everyone thought it would go back to normal. It didn't."

Some parents told the Tribune that pandemic-era growth seems to have set off a snowball effect, fueled by an explosion of online and at-home learning resources. But with limited data, the precise driver of the phenomenon largely eludes researchers.

Safety is the most common reason parents give for switching to homeschooling, according to Watson. But "safety" can mean different things, from shielding a child from certain viewpoints to protecting them from bullying. About 40 percent of families who homeschool have a child with special education needs, she added.

"It does seem to act as an exit ramp for a lot of people, where the traditional schools, whether public or private, aren't really aligning with their needs or their points of view," Watson said. "People are exiting on both ends of the spectrum."

'Free the kids'

Above a modest, mid-century church in South Holland, Aziza Butler weaved through rows of miniature desks. She smoothed out her long cardigan, the chatter of children echoing from the room next door.

Butler runs WeSchool Academy, a homeschool co-op with about 20 students, including her six children. The program, which is open to all ages, offers families the flexibility to send their kids as many days each week as they choose. Curriculum is infused with Bible study and faith-based values.

"I always say, I feel like I'm Harriet Tubman for homeschooling," Butler said. "Free the kids. Let them thrive."

The Butler family is Black, as are most of their students. Homeschooling is becoming increasingly racially diverse: A recent analysis from Johns Hopkins researchers found that the share of homeschoolers of color rose by 4 percentage points since 1998, while the proportion of white children declined.

Butler said at-home learning is empowering for Black communities, pointing to historic inequity and achievement gaps in public schools – what she still calls a "failing system."

"We've seen that in history where, Black people took it upon themselves to figure out how to give their kids what they need," Butler said. "I think about the civil rights struggle and how difficult that was. It was like, 'We're not gonna wait for it.'"

About a decade ago, Butler was a Chicago Public Schools teacher, fresh out of college with a class of 31 sixth-grade students in the Back of the Yards neighborhood. Her school was always short on books, staffing and funding, she said, and the large class sizes felt impersonal.

"My challenge wasn't just to be a good teacher, it was to combat a system that had to meet a bottom line," Butler said.

She left CPS after her first daughter was born, and her family has been homeschooling since. Butler started WeSchool more recently, when interest in at-home learning exploded during the pandemic. They moved into the south suburban church in 2022.

"I think parents really got to see what their kids were not doing, or what they could be doing, and they just got more involved," Butler said of the pandemic.

Few rules, little oversight

Only a handful of other states have little to no homeschooling regulations. The Illinois State Board of Education mandates which subjects must be taught – but families don't need to submit tests, homework or other materials. There's also no formal registration process, which makes it impossible to gauge the number of homeschoolers in Illinois.

Some school districts, including CPS, ask parents to notify officials if they opt for homeschooling, though they can't legally require it.

Last spring, Illinois lawmakers advanced a bill that would have mandated additional oversight, including a homeschool declaration form to be submitted to local districts. It followed a joint investigation from ProPublica and Capitol News Illinois, which found that the state does little to shield homeschooled students from potential neglect.

But the bill drew a slew of criticism from homeschooling advocates, who argued it constituted government overreach. It ultimately failed to pass.

Watson said that legislative oversight should be a conversation in states like Illinois, but noted that the process must be "thoughtful and strategic." In particular, she said, lawmakers should make an effort to consult the homeschooling community when crafting policies – especially as the population continues to grow.

"(These states) have virtually no regulation or laws or requirements around homeschooling," Watson said. "Then, they try to go from that to the most restrictive laws in the nation."

A network of alternatives

That growth, too, shows no signs of slowing. With a surge of homeschooling resources now available across Chicago, it is easier than ever to make the transition, parents told the Tribune.

Jen Covotsos' 8-year-old son, Vincent, bounced in and out of Catholic schools, but faced bullying, she said. At first, he tried online school – but Vincent felt isolated and struggled to focus. Covotsos scoured Facebook for other options until she found Blazing Star School last year.

Vincent has since been thriving there, Covotsos said. One of his interests is fishing, for example, so the children went on a field trip to an aquarium. He's also become an avid reader of books about marine life. The 8-year-old even asked his mom if he could attend full time.

"It makes us want to cry, because I never thought he would be connected with school and learning," Covotsos said. "He's a different kid."

Or take Ollie Allen, a Hyde Park resident whose 7-year-old foster daughter had never been in a conventional classroom. It led Allen to launch a small homeschooling pod in her apartment, focusing on flexible, individualized learning.

"A lot of times within the public schools, you have a calendar that you must follow, and it's kind of strict," said Allen, a former CPS teacher. "With the homeschooling model, kids get a chance to relax a little and let their hair down."

Outside of academic settings, a burgeoning activity network is helping homeschoolers socialize. After the pandemic, for example, Kilbourn Park resident Ben Huizenga started a theater troupe for at-home learners, now with about a dozen kids.

Their homespun productions also facilitate learning and literacy, Huizenga added.

"There was one kid who's been doing it two or three times. When he started, the script was the real challenge … He just couldn't read easily, and now it's getting better," Huizenga said. "So I'm like, inadvertently teaching this kid how to read."

FOCUS

Lisa McCord / TNS

Lisa McCord's "Self-Portrait, Restraints" (1982)

A photo project shows loneliness in uncomfortable ways

By DEBORAH VANKIN
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

LOS ANGELES — The photograph is so intimate, so vulnerable, it's painful to look at.

It depicts a woman in her early 20s lying on a hospital bed twisted to the side, her wrists and ankles restrained. The black-and-white image – nearly five feet wide – is so crisp that bits of the woman's toenail polish glimmer and the hair on her thigh appears to spark. Most pronounced: the loneliness and resignation on her face.

"I was 20 or 21 then. I'd had a psychotic episode and was taken to a public hospital in Massachusetts," says Palm Springs-based artist Lisa McCord of the self-portrait she later staged. "I'm very transparent and I wanted to share my experience afterward. It was the '70s. I'd tell people, in school, I'd been in a psychiatric hospital and no one wanted to hang out with me – it was a very lonely time."

McCord's work is part of an exhibition at the Los Angeles Center of Photography addressing the idea of loneliness, now considered an epidemic in America. The exhibition, "Reservoir: Photography, Loneliness and Well Being," was curated by LACP's executive director, Rotem Rozental, and includes participation from more than 40 artists representing "a wide array of geographies, approaches, ages, nationalities and lived experiences," she says.

Rozental had been thinking about loneliness in our society – how increasingly pervasive it is – since the start of the pandemic. In late 2024 she began having conversations about it with LACP board chair and artist Jennifer Pritchard. Art reflects the world that we live in and Rozental felt that, as a photography center, LACP had an obligation to amplify "some of the larger issues" our society is grappling with.

"There's something about photography that really brings people together around their vulnerabilities," Rozental says. "Even if it just means you're seeing, through an image, that someone else is experiencing what you're experiencing."

In this case: loneliness – "something that is looming heavy on everybody," Rozental adds.

Chronic loneliness is a serious, growing public health concern, says Dr. Jeremy Nobel, a professor at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and author of the 2023 book "Project UnLonely: Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection."

Asiya Al. Sharabi / TNS

Asiya Al. Sharabi's "Inward" (2025) addresses the uncertainty, and sometimes loneliness, of being a woman and an immigrant.

"Most recent studies indicate that 50 percent of Americans are often lonely," Nobel says, adding that a December 2025 study found that "loneliness is increasing, even after the pandemic. And it's driving a change in behavior, the big one being that people are disengaging from each other and community activities, so that also isolates them."

What's more, chronic loneliness has tangible, dangerous effects on our health, he says.

"Loneliness increases the risk of heart attack and stroke and general early mortality by up to 30 percent. Dementia risk goes up by 40 percent, diabetes risk goes up 35 percent from being chronically lonely. That's increased the urgency to address it as a public health crisis."

It's important to note, Nobel says, that there's a difference between being alone and being lonely, with the former potentially good for your health.

"Being alone means you don't have social connection. Loneliness is the subjective feeling that you don't have the social connections you want," Nobel says. "You can be lonely in a crowd, you can be lonely in a racist workplace, you can be lonely in a failed relationship or marriage. But being alone can actually be quite positive – solitude. You can be in touch with thoughts and feelings and can have emotional growth."

Nobel consulted with many of the artists during the development of "Reservoir." It was a natural pairing as his more than 20-year-old nonprofit, the Foundation for Art & Healing, explores how creative expression helps individuals and communities heal. The experience "definitely validated 'how do creative people use their creative orientation to further explore and reveal what's going on with loneliness,'" he says. "That's the power of this exhibit."

To create the exhibition, Rozental selected six photographic mentors, all established artists, each of whom chose a theme around loneliness – "aging," "immigration," "technology and hyper-consumerism" or "the solo creative process," for example. The mentors then invited artists to create new work responding to their themes. Over nine months last year, the groups of artists met monthly on Zoom – "six countries and seven time zones," says Rozental – along with therapists, scholars and others to plumb the topic.

The resulting exhibition features mostly two-dimensional photography but also includes multimedia works and 3D installations.

L.A.-based artist Diane Meyer sourced about 100 old black-and-white photographs from private collections. Then she hand-painted each of them, blocking out most everything in the image except select figures with white paint. The individuals in the photos appear to float in a sea of clouds or snow, disconnected.

In one image, two young boys teeter on a seesaw, as if suspended in midair; in another, a middle-aged man lies on a blanket in the fetal position, white paint spilling over onto his blanket and body, as if he is sinking into a void. The creative process – which the work speaks to – is evident here, the artist's hand noticeable. The paint is splotchy in places and the photographs are pinned delicately to a dark surface, their edges curling, giving the overall installation a textured materiality.

Meyer's work is in stark contrast to Jacque Rupp's installation on the opposite wall. Rupp's slick multimedia work speaks to both technology and societal perceptions of aging women. After recently becoming a grandmother, the Bay Area-based artist asked AI to "imagine a grandmother in 2025." The result is a black-and-white photo grid of several hundred female faces staring blankly into the camera, mouths closed and eyes vacant. Beside it is a TV monitor on which their faces morph into one another, without audio. The overall effect is polished and high-tech, touching on the perceived invisibility of women as they age.

"I felt that these two works needed to be in conversation," Rozental says.

Nearby, Julia Buteux's three-dimensional installation of transparent fabric panels hang from the ceiling, shimmying in the air and inviting guests to walk around it. The Rhode Island-based artist downloaded images from social media and deleted the people from them. The backgrounds are colorful but all that's left of the subject is a transparent imprint of their face and upper body. "So you're getting the absence of the user," Rozental says. It speaks to how isolating online social milieus can be.

Asiya Al. Sharabi – who is Yemeni American and lives between Egypt and Virginia – created large-scale, conceptual self-portraits that she manipulated in the printing process. One is a double exposure depicting the front and side of her face. It addresses issues of duality and the uncertainty of her standing in society as both a woman and an immigrant. In another, the artist sits in a rocking chair in a home beside a vase of dead flowers – but her body is transparent. "She almost disappears within the domestic space," Rozental says.

McCord's photograph is part of a larger interactive installation that includes a "visual diary" guests can flip through featuring photographs of her life over the decades paired with handwritten diary entries from 1977 to 2021. McCord narrates snippets from the diary, which visitors may listen to on headphones.

"Reservoir" aims, of course, to shine a light on the condition of loneliness. But it also hopes to serve as a public health intervention by hosting creative workshops – incorporating the photography in the exhibition – to address loneliness and spark connection.

"Creative expression changes our brains," Nobel says. "It reduces levels of the stress hormone cortisol, it increases the levels of the feel-good hormones, so you're less anxious about the world and in a better mood. It's then easier to engage with others. It invites us to be less lonely and more connected, not just to other people, but ourselves."

The exhibition, which closes March 14, is planned to travel internationally, including to the Museo Arte Al Límite in Chile, the Inside Out Centre for the Arts in South Africa and to the Karuizawa Foto Fest in Japan. The goal is to use the workshop element as a model that can be replicated in community arts organizations around the world.

HEALTH

Dreamstime / TNS

Cancer treatment can alter the taste or smell of food. Some people say food tastes bland. Others say it tastes metallic or too sweet or salty. You may need to try different foods to find what works for you.

MAYO CLINIC Q&A

Diet tips during cancer treatment

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

DEAR MAYO CLINIC: My husband has been diagnosed with cancer. I know his treatment will be hard on him, and I want to help in any way with his diet. What do you recommend for us?

ANSWER: Cancer treatments can take a toll on a person's body. Your husband's treatment may cause nausea, changes in appetite, taste and smell, diarrhea or constipation, making it harder to meet his nutritional needs. Fortunately, there are strategies you can use to cope with these side effects.

Weight changes

Weight changes are common. Weight loss without trying can reduce muscle mass, stamina and quality of life. Weight gain can lead to the development of other diseases, like diabetes or heart disease. Try to maintain your weight during treatment, even if it's outside a normal range.

Appetite changes

Cancer and cancer treatment may make you lose your appetite or eat more than usual.

■ If you lose your appetite: Eat smaller snacks that are high in calories, including yogurt, nuts, peanut butter and avocado. Eat more when your appetite is better. Food may sound unappealing even when you're hungry, making it difficult to eat. Try to find something that's appetizing. Keep snacks on hand.

■ If you eat more when stressed:Choose snacks such as fruits, vegetables and popcorn. Find ways to manage stress without food, such as going for a walk or calling a friend.

Nausea

Feeling sick or throwing up due to your treatments makes it hard to eat. Small changes to what and how you eat may help you feel better.

■ Eat foods that are easy on your stomach, such as crackers, toast, broth or broth-based soups, ice pops, hard candies, plain pasta and rice.

■ Eat five or six small meals a day. Smaller meals are often easier to keep down.

■ Don't skip meals or snacks. Even when you're not hungry, try to eat; an empty stomach can make nausea worse.

■ Sip small amounts of fluid during meals and throughout the day.

■ Try pretzels or crackers with your medicines if your care team says it's OK.

Taste and smell changes

Cancer treatment can alter the taste or smell of food. Some people say food tastes bland. Others say it tastes metallic or too sweet or salty. You may need to try different foods to find what works for you.

To help with taste changes:

■ Brighten the flavor. Add a little lemon, lime or vinegar unless your mouth is sore.

■ Try strong flavors. Use spices such as cinnamon, ginger, basil or rosemary.

■ Make foods sweeter. Add sugar or another sweetener if food tastes bitter or sour.

■ Use marinades before cooking.

■ Choose other proteins. If meat doesn't taste good, try beans, nuts or fish.

■ Use plastic or bamboo utensils. These may help if food tastes metallic.

■ Try new foods. You won't have expectations about the taste.

To help with strong smells:

■ Cook food in the microwave or use a crockpot or instant cooker in the garage.

■ Eat foods cold or at room temperature.

■ Cover food while it cooks.

■ Use a window or fan to help remove unpleasant odors.

■ Drink from a covered cup.

■ Ask a friend to cook for you.

Sore throat, mouth or trouble swallowing

When your throat is sore or it's hard to swallow, eating may be painful or tiring. These tips can help:

■ Soften the texture. Opt for smooth foods, such as cooked cereal, mashed potatoes or scrambled eggs.

■ Cool things down. Choose smoothies, ice pops or a bowl of ice cream.

■ Take smaller bites and cut food into tiny pieces.

■ Avoid what bothers you. Spicy, sour, crunchy or vinegar-based foods, citrus fruits, tomato sauce or carbonated beverages can cause discomfort.

■ Suck on ice chips or ice pops.

Diarrhea and constipation

Bowel changes are unpleasant but common side effects of cancer treatment.

To help with diarrhea:

■ Eat small, frequent meals and snacks.

■ Choose soft, low-fiber foods.

■ Avoid caffeine and alcohol.

■ Limit lactose found in milk and yogurt.

■ Avoid sugar substitutes such as sorbitol, xylitol or mannitol, which are often found in sugar-free candy or gum.

■ Drink plenty of fluids, including electrolyte-containing fluids, to stay hydrated.

For constipation, aim to:

■ Drink enough fluid to stay hydrated and keep stools soft. Try to drink eight to 10 cups of water each day. Warm coffee, tea or broth-based soup in the morning can help your bowels move. Use the bathroom when you feel the urge.

■ Move your body. Even short walks help your digestive system work better.

■ Keep regular mealtimes.

■ Eat a high-fiber diet.

Your husband's care team is an excellent resource for what you can expect during treatment and for the symptoms that may affect his diet and weight.

Grace Fjeldberg is a registered dietitian nutritionist in Nutrition/Oncology at Mayo Clinic Health System in Mankato, Minnesota.

Is your diet causing UTIs? Here's how it may be at fault

By MIRIAM FAUZIA
The Dallas Morning News (TNS)

UTIs can be painful, and they're not something people like to talk about. But they happen often, affecting an estimated 60 percent of women and 20 percent of men in their lifetimes.

While we might view these infections as minor, they can become serious in rare cases. Actress Tanya Roberts, best known for her roles in the television series "Charlie's Angels" and "That '70s Show," died in 2021 after a urinary tract infection developed into sepsis.

Advice for preventing or treating UTIs has long focused on diet – think cranberry juice, avoiding coffee or drinking more water. Indeed, some research suggests what you eat and drink may affect your risk for developing a urinary tract infection. Here's what you need to know.

What is a urinary tract infection?

A urinary tract infection affects the body's drainage system, which removes urine filled with toxins, extra water and salt. The urinary tract includes two kidneys, two ureters – thin tubes that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder – the bladder and the urethra, which connects to the bladder.

Urinary tract infections usually occur when bacteria – most often Escherichia coli – infect the lower urinary tract. The bacteria are generally harmless in the gut, but when shed in feces and transferred to the urinary tract, the microbes can travel up the urethra and settle in the bladder.

Women tend to get these infections more than men because of their shorter urethras. Some symptoms of a urinary tract infection include frequent and painful urination, back or pelvic pain and urine that looks red, bright pink or cola-colored, according to Mayo Clinic.

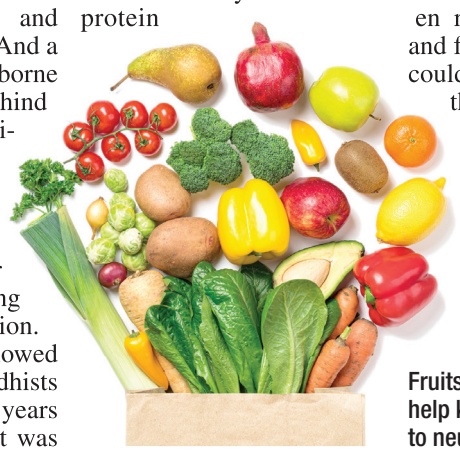
Eat this, not that

Eating undercooked meat – or food contaminated with E. coli – may contribute to urinary tract infections.

A 2025 study found that in nearly one in five urinary tract infections among a group of patients in Southern California, E. coli from contaminated meat and poultry was the cause. And a 2023 study found foodborne E. coli was likely behind more than 480,000 urinary tract infections in the U.S. each year.

Some research suggests a vegetarian diet may lower the risk of developing a urinary tract infection. A 2020 study that followed more than 9,000 Buddhists in Taiwan for nine years found a vegetarian diet was associated with a 16 percent lower risk of urinary tract infections, with the protection more pronounced in women.

One reason for this benefit may be how vegetarian diets influence urine pH. Red meat and other animal proteins tend to make urine more acidic, while fruits and vegetables do not, according to Healthline. UTIs may be easier to fight when urine pH is closer to neutral. A 2015 study found that a protein made in response to urinary tract infection was more effective at quelling bacterial growth when urine was less acidic.



Fruits and vegetables can help keep your urine pH closer to neutral. Photos from Getty Images

Drink this, not that

What you drink may also influence urinary tract symptoms. A 2017 study found that cutting back on foods and beverages that can irritate the bladder – such as coffee, tea, alcohol and soft drinks – helped women reduce urinary urgency and frequency. But the study couldn't determine whether the improvement was tied to cutting out one specific beverage or several at once.

A 2003 study found that people who drank freshly squeezed juice and ate dairy products such as yogurt appeared to have a lower risk of UTIs. The link between UTIs and gut-healthy foods may involve the microbiome: A 2022 study suggested that recurrent UTIs in some women may be related to repeated antibiotic use wrecking the collection of microorganisms, including bacteria, living in the gut.

Coffee is one of the beverages that can irritate the bladder.

While research into how different foods and drinks impact urinary tract infections is still ongoing, dietary changes may be worth discussing with a doctor, especially for people with recurrent infections.

Reading to young kids improves their social skills

New study also shows it doesn't matter whether parents stop to ask questions

By ERIN CLABOUGH
University of Virginia (The Conversation)

In 2024, 51 percent of families read aloud to their very young children, while 37 percent read aloud to their kids between the ages of 6 and 8 years old.

Some parents have said they stop reading aloud to their school-age children because their kids can read on their own.

I'm a neuroscientist with four children, and I wondered whether children might be losing more than just the pleasure of listening to books read aloud. In particular, I wondered whether it affected their empathy and creativity.

A simple idea from the literature

I have studied and written about empathy and creativity as part of my personal effort to better understand how to be a good parent. I have found that empathy and creativity aren't talents you're born with or without. They are skills that respond to practice, just like learning to play piano.

But my children weren't being taught either empathy or creativity in elementary school. And the data showed that young people's empathy and creativity may have dropped over the past few decades.

Empathy isn't just about being nice. It's a superpower that helps children predict behavior and navigate social situations safely. It makes them better at reading faces and emotional cues.

And creativity is essential for self-control and problem-solving. It's much easier to regulate your behavior if you can imagine multiple solutions to a problem instead of fixating on the one thing you're not supposed to do.

About 10 years ago, I started making some changes at home to ensure that my children got these skills.

Setting aside 15 minutes at night was sometimes the only one-on-one time I had with each kid, with bedtimes of 7:30, 7:45, 8:00 and 8:15 p.m. It was precious to me. I wondered whether using conflicts in bedtime stories as teachable moments would help them develop more empathy for others and boost their creativity.

I wrote in 2016 about how I think my children became more empathetic when we paused at times during a book to ask: "How do you think this character feels?" and "What would you do?"

But no one had tested this experiment on a broader scale.

THE CONVERSATION

Photos from Getty Images

In a world designed to pull families toward screens, bedtime reading remains a refuge where parent and child share the same imaginative space.

Testing the idea

Beginning in 2017, four colleagues and I recruited 38 families in central Virginia with children ages 6 to 8, which is an age when kids are navigating social relationships and experiencing intense brain development. All of the children in our study were somewhat independent beginning readers or they could read independently. In our study, caregivers read one storybook nightly for two weeks.

I chose seven illustrated books: "The Tooth Fairy Wars," "Library Lion," "A Letter for Leo," "Stuck with the Blooz," "Cub's Big World," "Nugget and Fang" and "A New Friend for Marmalade." There was nothing special about these books except that they all contained some sort of social conflict – and my kids gave them a thumbs-up.

They were about, among other characters, a polar bear cub who becomes separated from his mother in the snow, and a boy who hid his teeth from the tooth fairy.

Half the families in our study read a book each night straight through without pausing. The other half paused at one conflict point per story to ask two reflection questions. For example, when the tooth fairy stole the tooth Nathan desperately wanted to keep, they asked, "How would you feel if you were Nathan?" If the child answered, parents just listened. If not, they waited 30 seconds before continuing.

Before and after two weeks, we tested children's empathetic ability to understand what others might be thinking and how they are feeling. We also tested creativity using the alternative uses task, which asked kids to generate creative ideas, such as thinking of unusual uses for a paper clip or listing things with wheels.

A boost in empathy either way

After just 14 bedtimes with books, we found – as our 2026 research shows – that children whose parents paused for questions got better at understanding others' perspectives. But so did children whose parents just read straight through.

We found that what scientists call cognitive and overall empathy improved significantly in both groups between childen's initial visit and our follow-up visit two weeks after they read the books for a week.

This may be because it is easier to quickly develop cognitive empathy – meaning when you put yourself in someone else's shoes – as compared to developing emotional empathy, or feeling what others feel. Emotional empathy involves different brain regions and likely requires longer to change deeply rooted emotional processing patterns.

A creative approach

After two weeks of bedtime reading, children in both groups got better at creative thinking. We used a standard creativity test that measures the number and the originality of responses when children were asked to think of uses for everyday objects. For example, if asked about a brick, a common answer would be to build a wall, while a more original response might be to grind it up to make red chalk.

But the children whose parents paused for questions generated significantly more ideas overall.

Their responses delighted me: They suggested using a paper clip as wire in a potato clock, to help put on a doll's shoes, or to simply see what sound it makes hitting the floor.

We also noticed that the younger kids came up with more original ideas than the older ones. This matches other research showing that creativity may fade as children grow up and they prioritize fitting in with others more than thinking differently.

What we still need to learn

Our study had limitations: We did not have a comparison group that did not read at all. And most families had a higher income, with 92 percent of families earning more than $50,000 per year.

Future research could address this gap and also investigate whether the benefits we found persist past two weeks – and whether they translate into real-world kindness.

But importantly, we found no gender differences in our study. The practice works equally well for boys and girls. And even though the majority of our families said they already read regularly to their children, this practice still worked to boost empathy and creativity.

Bedtime stories are about more than routine

As a neuroscientist, I know the elementary school years are a particularly powerful window when children experience intense formation of new brain connections.

These 15 minutes of reading aren't just about preparing kids to sleep or teaching them to decode words. They're building neural pathways for understanding others and imagining possibilities. With repeated practice, these connections strengthen, just like practicing piano.

In a world designed to pull families toward screens, bedtime reading remains a refuge where parent and child share the same imaginative space.

But the pressure's off for parents: You don't have to read in any special way. Just read.

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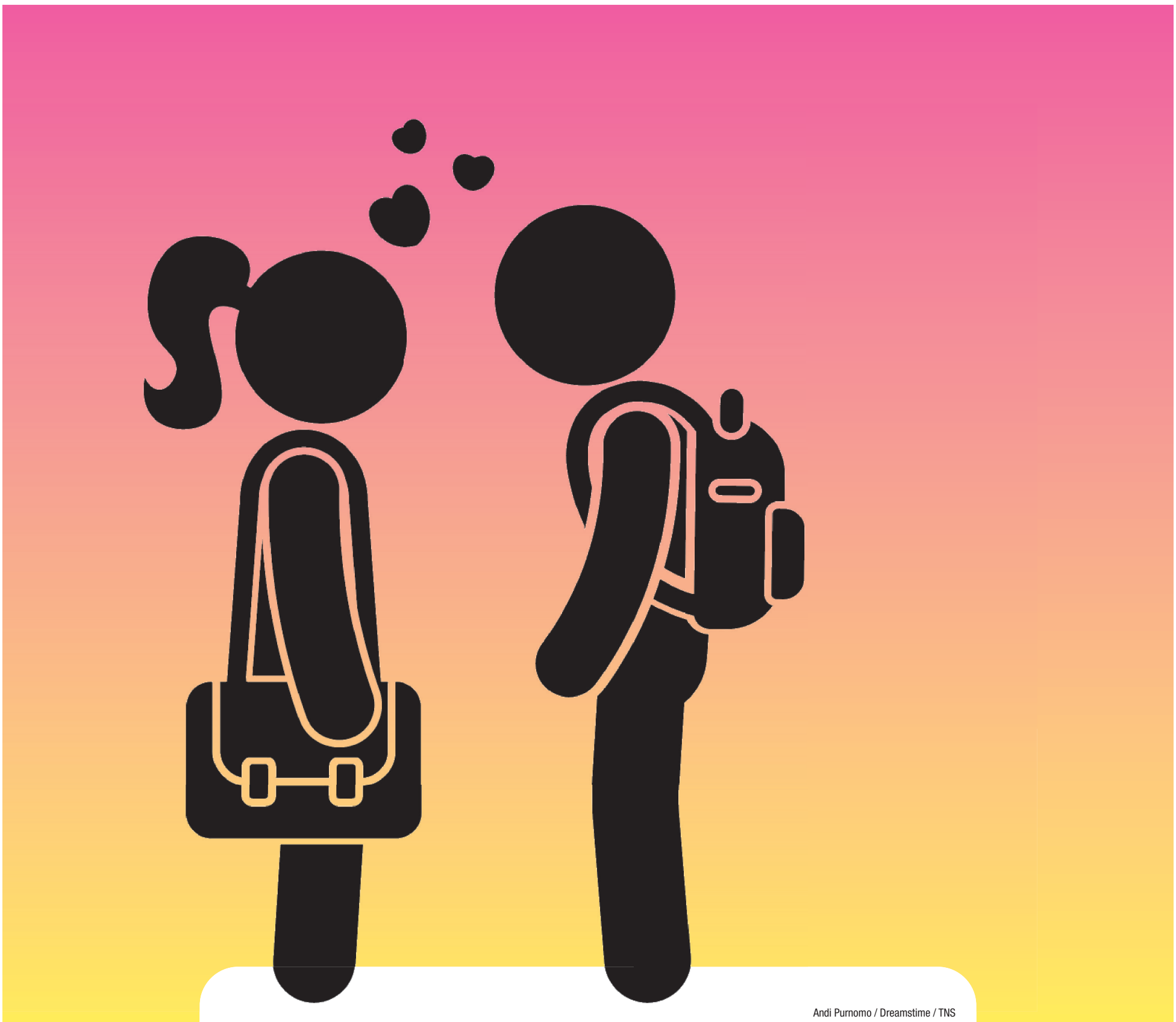


Andi Purnomo / Dreamstime / TNS

Things change as children become pre-teens and teens where dating may involve physical affection such as kissing, cuddling, holding hands, and more. There is not a specific age at which dating is best.

ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

Your child's first crush

By ANISHA ABRAHAM, MD, MPH, FAAP
American Academy of Pediatrics (TNS)

Do you remember the first time you looked at a classmate and your heart pounded just a little bit harder? For most people, that moment comes during the teen years, but for some children, feelings or romantic interest can begin well before puberty. While this may catch parents by surprise, it is a normal part of social and emotional development.

While having a healthy one-on-one relationship is an important part of becoming an adult, conversations about friendships and relationships shouldn't wait until adolescents. Talking with your child about relationships with their peers at every age sets the foundation for healthy personal connections as they grow.

Children first learn about loving and caring relationships from their families. As they grow, they also pick up messages from friends, television, music and social media. Some of these messages are positive, but others may be confusing or unhealthy. That's why it's so important to have brief, age-appropriate conversations that emphasize kindness, respect and boundaries. You don't need to schedule a formal talk. Teachable moments often occur while reading a book, watching a show or listening to music. A simple question like "What do you think about how they treated each other" can open the door for discussion.

Young, primary school-aged kids may say they have a girlfriend or boyfriend. Some may try to sneak kisses from classmates or even hold hands. Usually these relationships are brief, innocent and don't go very far. It is important not to tease children or dismiss their feelings. Help your child understand that while having feelings for someone else is normal, it is best to wait until they are older to have a serious romantic relationship. Seeing friendship as a normal interaction between people of any gender is an important lesson.

Things change as children become pre-teens and teens where dating may involve physical affection such as kissing, cuddling, holding hands and more. There is not a specific age at which dating is best. Every adolescent matures at a different rate and may be ready for a romantic relationship at a different age.

Some adults may be cynical about or dismiss teenage relationships. They believe that friendships and love at this age can be short-lived. However, this does not mean a teen relationship is less important or less strong than an adult relationship. Friendships and even romantic relationships in the teenage years are just as real, and perhaps as painful, as relationships at any other point in life.

Be ready and open to talking to your pre-teen or teen about their relationships. Don't be surprised if your kid, who always told you everything, starts to go silent. It is a natural process for adolescents to become more independent and put peers over family. Your role has changed from the main character to a supporting cast member. But your teen needs your support and advice as they navigate the ups and downs of their relationships.

Talking about relationships with teens can be tough! Your teen may feel bad about not having dated or may even have been rejected by someone. To open the topic, you might begin by asking, "Are any of your friends or classmates dating or in a relationship?" After that, it is less important what you say, than that you listen carefully. If your teen says absolutely nothing, then it might be best to wait and ask again later.

If your teen shares information, try to listen without judgment or reaction. Simply hear what they are saying and then ask a question about it without offering your opinion. If your teen shares a concern, create a safe space with a positive, problem-solving attitude. This helps avoid making your teen feel like it is an overwhelming problem. Be a calm voice of reason.

Try your best not to overly empathize. Maintain a reasonable distance from the ups and downs of teenage life. This means if your daughter has a fight with her boyfriend, you sympathize with her feelings but also take the long view.

Keep in mind that most adolescents (even older adolescents) have never had a dating relationship. Among 15- to 17-year-olds, most (66 percent) are not and never have been in a romantic relationship. Additionally, despite a lot of peer pressure, more than 50 percent of teens wait until after high school to have sex. Keep in mind that you are the best person to teach your teen about healthy and consensual relationships, love, and commitment. What teens learn about sex may help influence their future choices and health. For instance, if your teen chooses to abstain from sex, they avoid the risk of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. If your teen is sexually active, proper use of birth control can help reduce these risks.

Although it is a good idea to let your teen learn through experience, it is important to know when to step in. Some relationships are so unhealthy that they may be dangerous to your teen. Some signs you may need to step in and have a serious conversation with your teen, welcome or not, include extremely controlling behavior or extreme jealousy, isolation from friends and family, unexplained or poorly explained bruises or injuries, loss of interest in activities that your teen previously enjoyed, a sudden change in behavior, a drop in grades, frequent arguments, a large age-gap between partners, and extreme changes in personality, especially around their partner.

Keep in mind that you and your teen may not always agree on what's best. Though you may not have control over your adolescent's love life, you can be supportive through the joys and heartbreaks that will happen along the way. With open conversations and a calm supportive approach, you can help your teen build the foundation for healthy relationships that last well beyond adolescence.

Anisha Abraham, MD, MPH, FAAP is Chief of the Division of Adolescent Medicine at Children's National Hospital and author of "Raising Global Teens."

FINANCE

SURVEY

Most couples keep at least some of their money separate

By ANA STAPLES
Bankrate.com (TNS)

When you're in a committed relationship, you unavoidably merge at least some aspects of your financial lives. However, that doesn't mean you have to combine all of your accounts. In fact, most Americans don't.

Most couples in committed relationships (62 percent) keep at least some financial accounts in their name only, according to new Bankrate survey data. For the purposes of the survey, we define "couples in a committed relationship" as those who are married, in a civil partnership or living with a romantic partner.

A measure of separation in money matters in healthy relationships, according to Rayna McClane, a financial literacy advocate at Rebellious Resources, a financial coaching firm. It's typically less risky than fully combining all your accounts.

"If you're combining finances, you're not just commingling your assets," McClane says. "You're also commingling your liabilities."

Here's more on how couples in America approach combining finances, when they first start discussing money in relationships – and how you and your significant other can approach the topic.

Dreamstime / TNS

Most couples in committed relationships (62 percent) keep at least some financial accounts in their name only, according to new Bankrate survey data.

Less than 40 percent of couples completely combine finances

Fewer than 2 in 5 American couples (38 percent) completely combine their finances. In fact, about 1 in 4 (26 percent) keep their financial accounts completely separate, and the remaining 36 percent have a mix of joint and separate accounts.

Trinity Smith, 27, and Zachary Sherman, 26, live in Bossier City, Louisiana. They've been a couple for about three years and moved in together just over a year ago. Since then, they have implemented what they call a "weekly household meeting" to go over finances and update a spreadsheet where they track their expenses. This is especially helpful since they don't contribute financially at the same level with Smith working full time and Sherman juggling full-time college studies and part-time work.

The couple is candid with each other about money despite keeping all their accounts separate.

Such an approach is much safer than fully combining finances, according to McClane. When you fully merge your finances with someone else's, their liabilities become yours. Should anything go wrong – with the relationship or the finances – it can be more difficult to extract yourself from the situation.

"It is incredibly important that whatever the gender makeup is of a relationship, you retain your financial identity throughout the beginning, middle and potentially end of that," she explains.

Most Americans say couples should start discussing money after a few months of dating

When it comes to when couples should start discussing various money matters with a romantic partner, the most common answer in all six categories was after a few months of dating.

Heavy conversations about money early on can be "a little too much for some people," McClane says. At the same time, it's an important topic that shouldn't be delayed for too long. There are ways to start bringing up the subject organically within the first few dates, even if it's simply asking how the person prefers to split the check.

"I don't think it's [ever] too early to start the discussions," McClane says. "And frankly, the earlier that you begin them, even in these small stages, the easier they are to build and discuss really hard things."

Smith and Sherman were forced to discuss money relatively early since he experienced a financial emergency a few months into dating.

"The cost of that, because my insurance refused to cover it, kind of forced a financial discussion," Sherman explains.

With time, it grew less difficult for the couple to talk about finances, especially as they learned each other's habits – which are vastly different. Smith likes to save money and Sherman admits he's an "impulse spender."

"It's something that, through trial and error, I think we reached a pretty good middle ground on," Smith says.

Keeping completely separate accounts decreases with age

Like Sherman and Smith, most Gen Z couples (ages 18-29) maintain their own accounts. In fact, more than half of Gen Zers (51 percent) keep their finances completely separate, versus 34 percent of millennials (ages 30-45), 23 percent of Gen Xers (ages 46-61) and only 15 percent of baby boomers (ages 62-80).

The situation is almost the opposite for baby boomers: nearly half (45 percent) completely combine their finances, compared to 22 percent of Gen Zers, 32 percent of millennials and 40 percent of Gen Xers.

Data paints a similar picture when it comes to discussing money in general. Across the board, younger people are more comfortable talking about financial topics with loved ones and close friends, according to Bankrate's Financial Taboos Survey.

"From what I've seen, [Gen Z] do really prioritize fair, balanced relationships," McClane says.

This might be because younger people have grown up with more legal and financial rights than any generation before them, McLane theorizes. Marriage was once a financial necessity for women, who until the 1970s could be denied credit or fired during pregnancy. But these protections already existed when Gen Zers were born, so they're more likely to view a relationship as a choice where they keep their financial autonomy – rather than a safety net they need.

How to approach finances as a couple

Money can be an awkward topic, but it's not one you want to avoid in a relationship. Here's how you can find the right approach to combining finances as a couple.

■ Have a conversation about your values

It can be hard to talk about money if you think of these discussions strictly as money conversations, McClane says. "It perhaps becomes a little bit easier when we talk about what you value, what you want for the future and then how you will financially accommodate that."

Once you know what you both want, you can discuss what tools you need to achieve it. Perhaps a savings account for pooled emergency funds would make sense. Or maybe you need to become an authorized user on their rewards credit card to earn enough miles for your next vacation.

■ Talk about protecting your money

As a couple, you also want to keep your finances – and each other – safe. McClane recommends discussing access to accounts used to pay for rent or mortgage, utilities and other necessities. Should something happen to one person, the other should be able to continue using that account for all essential payments.

"I think that's one advantage… to having at least a partially combined account," she says.

■ •Discuss your contributions

Whether you have combined accounts, you need to decide how each of you will contribute to your shared financial responsibilities and goals. Going 50/50 might work for some, but if one person makes significantly less, it might not be an equitable distribution, McClane says.

When it comes to Smith and Sherman's budget, Smith contributes more and does most of the money management. Still, the couple makes it work.

"Open communication is key," Smith laughs. "People were not kidding about that."

"And learning each other's thought process," Sherman adds, "and being a bit graceful with speed bumps… is pretty important."

Methodology This survey has been conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc panel of individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The total sample size was 2,564 U.S. adults, of whom 1,208 are married/ in a civil partnership/living with a partner. Fieldwork was undertaken between Dec. 2-8, 2025. The survey was carried out online and meets rigorous quality standards. It gathered a non-probability-based sample and employed demographic quotas and weights to better align the survey sample with the broader U.S. population.

Visit Bankrate online at bankrate.com.

FOOD

Say hello to sorghum

Your newest cooking ally

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

When you've got a family member with a severe gluten allergy, it can be slim pickings when it comes to baked goods and other dishes made with grains like wheat, barley and rye.

Not only are menu choices often limited when planning dinner or dessert, but even a mild sensitivity can wreak havoc on a loved one's tummy if you don't use distinct cookware and keep counters, cutting boards and utensils super clean to avoid cross contamination.

One-to-one gluten-free flours and naturally gluten-free grains and seeds like quinoa, corn, buckwheat, rice and oats make it easier at meal time, at an added expense.

Anyone who's shopped the gluten-free aisle at a major grocery store or perused the offerings on websites like Bob's Red Mill knows these specialty products are significantly more expensive than everyday products made with wheat. That's thanks to economies of scale (it's a much smaller market), the rigorous testing involved to achieve certification and all the experimenting that goes into making a product that actually tastes good.

A 12-ounce loaf of Udi's gluten-free white sandwich bread, for example, typically costs $6 or more at most grocery stores – roughly two or three times the price of a 16-ounce "regular" white loaf.

Still, gluten-free products are a culinary lifeline for some, as well as a fun way to add a little variety to daily meals with different tastes and textures.

With that in mind, we'd like to introduce you to sorghum, an alternative grain you might be unfamiliar with but should get to know.

Available both as a milled flour and a pearled cereal grain, sorghum is considered an ancient grain – that is, it's been grown for hundreds of years and largely remains unaltered through modern farming practices. It's believed to have been domesticated in East-Central Africa at least 5,000 years ago.

Today, it's the fifth most produced cereal crop in the world after wheat, corn, rice and barley, making it an important dietary staple for more than 500 million of the most food-insecure people in the world.

High-energy and drought-tolerant, sorghum's leaves and stems can be used to feed livestock and also to produce ethanol. In the culinary arena, it can be cooked into a cereal and porridge; used as a base in grain bowls, salads and soups; fermented in alcoholic beverages; and crushed like sugar cane or beets to produce a syrup.

It also can be popped like corn for a nutritious snack.

Why build out your pantry with a bag of soft white sorghum flour or a package of the golden, couscous-like grain?

Not only is sorghum a natural source of heart-healthy antioxidants, but whole grain sorghum is a great source of fiber and protein. It's also full of zinc, selenium and copper and is naturally gluten-free.

But the main reason to try it if you don't have a gluten sensitivity is that sorghum adds a hearty, nutty flavor to so many recipes. And it is just so versatile. Depending on whether you use it in grain, flour or syrup form, you can boil it on the stovetop, bake it in the oven in breads, rolls, cookies and pie crusts or bring it to fluffy life in a rice cooker or slow cooker.

One more plus: Since most of the world's sorghum is grown in the U.S. in what's known as the "Sorghum Belt" that runs from South Dakota to southern Texas, you're supporting U.S. farmers and the economy.

To help you test the waters, we've gathered some easy recipes that shine a light on both sorghum flour and pearled grain sorghum.

Sorghum products can be purchased from specialty grain suppliers like Nu Life Market and Bob's Red Mill, or at some grocery stores (including Whole Foods) and health food markets like Naturally Soergel's in Franklin Park and East End Food Co-op in Point Breeze.

Sorghum Chocolate Chip Cookies

Makes up to 2 dozen cookies (depending on portioning)

Gluten-free cookies often have an "off" taste. Thanks to the addition of brown butter, these definitely won't disappoint.

- 1 stick unsalted butter, cut into chunks, divided
- 1/4 cup light brown sugar
- 1/4 cup dark brown sugar
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 large egg, cold right out of the fridge
- 1 1/3 cups sorghum flour
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 4-6 ounces good quality dark chocolate, cut into chunks
- 2 ounces toasted hazelnuts, pecans or walnuts, optional

In a small saucepan over medium heat, brown half of the butter.

Remove the hot pan of brown butter from the heat and add remaining butter. Stir well and let cool while you weigh your flour and prep the other ingredients.

In a mixing bowl, stir together light brown, dark brown and granulated sugars.

Add cooled brown butter to sugars, along with vanilla. Stir until blended.

Stir in the egg. Let mixture rest for about 5 minutes, then stir again.

Mix together sorghum flour, cornstarch, baking soda and salt, then add to egg mixture to make a soft dough.

Add chocolate chunks and nuts (if using). Shape into large or small balls, then press them down slightly so cookies will have flat tops. Arrange on tray and chill for at least 30 minutes, or until firm. (I portioned the dough into 20 smallish balls, which resulted in Oreo-sized cookies.)

When ready to bake, preheat oven to 350 degrees and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Arrange cookies a few inches apart on the baking sheet.

Bake cookies for 15-18 minutes, or until crispy around the edges but still soft in the center. (Large cookies will bake a little longer.)

cookiemadness.net

Roasted Cherry Tomato, Kale and Sorghum Salad

Serves 4

Waiting for the sorghum to finish cooking – it takes about an hour – is the hardest thing about this nutritious vegetarian salad. I used grape tomatoes and lacinato (Tuscan) kale, but you could add any favorite green or veggie. Consider doubling the dressing if you prefer a really moist grain salad.

FOR SALAD BASE:

- 1 cup pearled sorghum grain, rinsed in a fine mesh colander
- 3 cups water
- 1 pint cherry or grape tomatoes
- 1 large shallot, peeled and sliced in half
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Sea salt

FOR DRESSING:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Juice 1/2 lemon
- 1 clove garlic, pressed or minced
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- Salt and pepper, to taste

FOR SALAD:

- 3 cups chopped lacinato kale
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/4 cup crumbled feta
- 1 cup rinsed and drained garbanzo beans, optional

First, cook the sorghum: Combine rinsed sorghum and 3 cups water in a small pot. Bring to a boil, cover and reduce heat to medium-low.

Cook until sorghum is pleasantly tender but still has some chew, 55-65 minutes. You can wait until the sorghum is halfway cooked before proceeding with the next steps.

Roast cherry tomatoes and shallot: Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a small, rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper for easy cleanup.

Toss whole cherry tomatoes and shallot halves with 1 tablespoon olive oil and a sprinkle of salt. Roast until the tomatoes are soft, plump and starting to burst open, about 18 minutes. Chop shallot into small pieces.

Make the dressing: Whisk together olive oil, lemon juice, minced garlic, red pepper flakes, salt and pepper until emulsified. Taste and add more salt, red pepper flakes or lemon juice if not tangy enough.

Once the sorghum is done cooking, drain off any excess water and pour cooked sorghum into a serving bowl.

Pour in all of the dressing, all of the cherry tomatoes and their juices, shallots, chopped kale, Parmesan, feta and chickpeas (optional). Season to taste with pepper, toss well and serve.

Adapted from bobsredmill.com

Carla Hall's Sorghum Soul Food Buttermilk Biscuits

Makes 16 biscuits

My attempt at making sorghum bread was an absolute fail. ("Brick" doesn't even begin to describe what came out of the pan.) But these light and fluffy Southern biscuits? Pure heaven!

Sorghum flour adds a mild, slightly sweet and nutty flavor to this recipe from celebrity chef and cookbook author Carla Hall. They are great as is, warm from the oven and slathered with butter, or at room temperature with honey or jam. They are best on the day they are baked, but also delicious reheated for several days afterwards. Store in an airtight container in the fridge.

Be sure to mix with your hands to prevent overworking the gluten, which will result in tough biscuits instead of flaky.

- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, frozen, plus extra softened butter for the pan
- 2 cups unbleached, all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling out dough
- 1/2 cup sorghum flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 2 tablespoons vegetable shortening (like Crisco)
- 1 cup cold buttermilk, well-shaken

Preheat oven to 450 degrees and butter a large cast-iron skillet. If you don't have one, a large round cake pan will work. Set aside.

Put both flours, baking powder, sugar, salt and baking soda in a large bowl and use your open hand to mix them together, using your fingers as a whisk.

Add in shortening and use your fingertips to pinch it completely into the mixture until you get coarse crumbs.

Use a box grater's large holes to grate the frozen butter into the flour mixture. Toss so that all pieces are coated with flour.

Add buttermilk and use your hand as a spatula to gently mix the dough into a shaggy mass. Scrape the dough off your hand.

Use a large spoon to drop 16 equal sized mounds of dough into the prepared skillet, spacing about 1 inch apart.

Bake for 20 minutes, until golden brown. Let cool a bit and then serve.

Adapted from "Carla Hall's Soul Food: Everyday and Celebration" (Harper, $35)

Sorghum Mushroom Soup

Serves 4

This soul-warming soup recipe is so simple! I used white button mushrooms and added a few slices of baby bella just before serving as a garnish.

- 1 cup cooked pearled sorghum grain
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 pound white mushrooms, wiped clean and chopped into bite-sized pieces
- 1 yellow onion, peeled and diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- Dash of Worcestershire sauce
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 32-ounce carton of vegetable broth or stock
- Sour cream, for serving, optional
- Chopped parsley, for serving, optional

In a large pot over medium heat, heat butter and 2 tablespoons olive oil.

Add mushrooms and cook until they release their liquid, about 4-5 minutes. Remove to a bowl.

Add remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil to pot along with chopped onions. Cook over medium heat until translucent, about 4 minutes, then add garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant.

Stir in Worcestershire sauce, fold in cooked mushrooms and cooked sorghum. Stir well to combine.

Add vegetable broth or stock, and simmer soup for 10-15 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

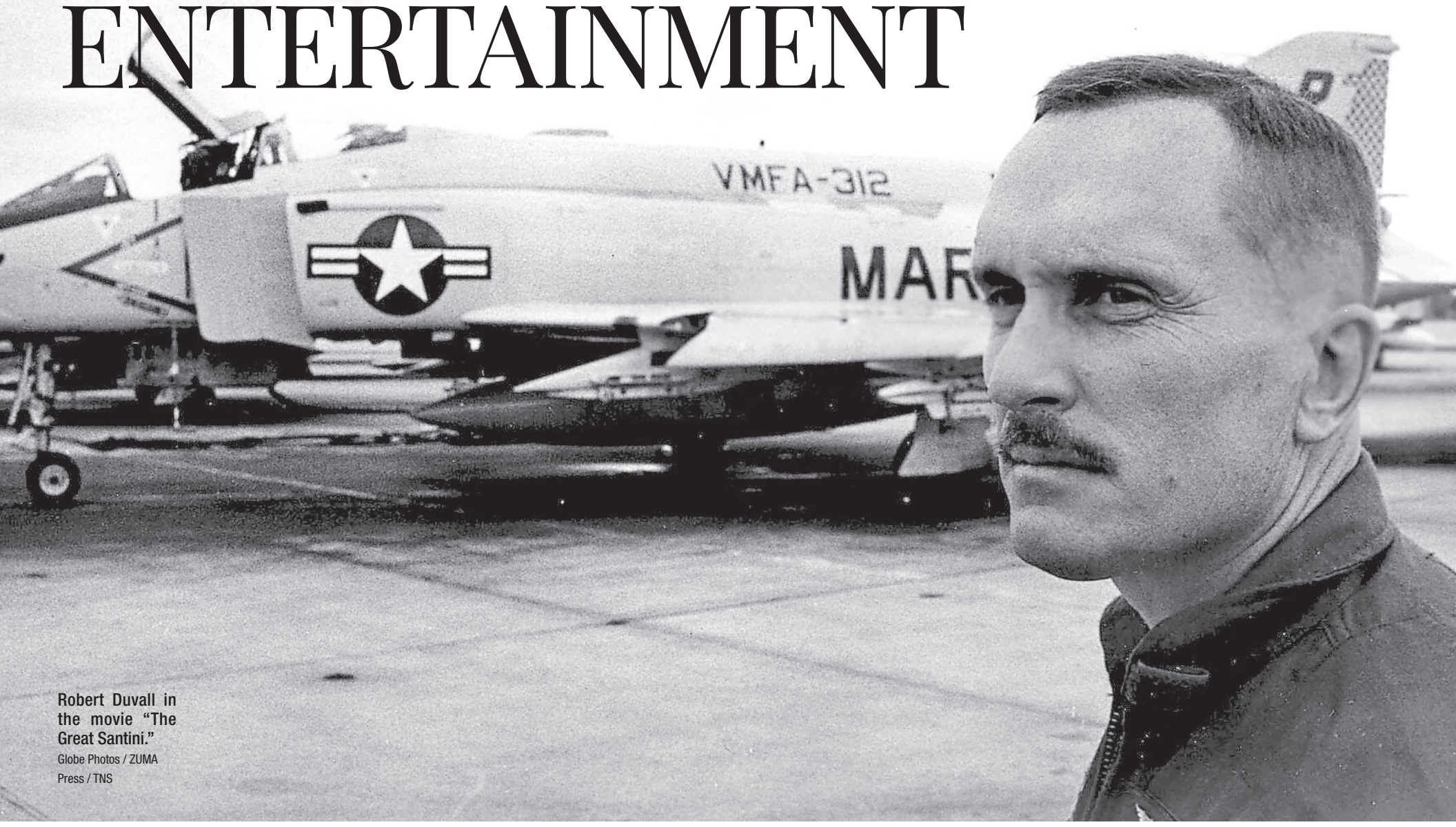
Serve in soup bowls, garnished with a dollop of sour cream and a pinch of chopped parsley.

Adapted from edibleseattle.com

Gretchen McKay / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette / TNS

Pearled sorghum, an ancient grain, is the base of this flavorful and nutritious salad featuring roasted tomatoes

ENTERTAINMENT



Robert Duvall in the movie "The Great Santini."
Globe Photos / ZUMA Press / TNS

Duvall's 10 essential films

By AMY NICHOLSON, MARK OLSEN, JOSHUA ROTHKOPF, JOSH ROTTENBERG and GLENN WHIPP
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

IFA Film / ZUMA Press / TNS

Robert Duvall in the movie "Apocalypse Now."

He whispered in the ears of the powerful, strode the battlefield like a god of war and ultimately embodied both of those extremes in performances of exquisite complexity. Robert Duvall's death on Sunday at age 95 signifies not just an incalculable loss to movie fans, but also the turning of a generational page, away from the dazzling character actors who redefined screen performance in the '60s and '70s to a new, as yet undefined group who will carry the work further.

While Duvall's filmography is too rich for us to be comprehensive – even when he's on the margins, he shines – here are our 10 favorites, presented in the order of their release.

'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1962)

How marvelous that Duvall made his screen debut as Boo Radley in the 1962 classic "To Kill a Mockingbird." So what if the role had no dialogue? An unknown theater actor couldn't ask for a better drum roll than a script that talks about his character nonstop but doesn't show his face until the last five minutes. To young Scout (Mary Badham), Boo is the neighborhood bogeyman who stabbed his abusive father with scissors and spent years locked inside a bat-infested cell. When she gets her first real peek at him, he's stabbing someone again in self-defense. Even so, what a jolt to finally see Duvall's pale, blond Boo hiding behind a door as though (justly) scared of the spotlight. He barely allows the petrified Boo to twitch, yet somehow, we catch a glimpse of the qualities Duvall the actor will go on to reveal: dangerous and vulnerable, mythic and man-sized, electrifyingly watchable.

– Amy Nicholson

'The Godfather' (1972) and 'The Godfather Part II' (1974)

There are many reasons why "The Godfather Part III" didn't work. The script was rushed, the plotting tangled and confusing. The supporting characters were forgettable. Poor Sofia Coppola, a last-minute replacement for Winona Ryder, flat-out couldn't act.

But the biggest problem: There was no Duvall. Casting George Hamilton instead of making Duvall an offer he couldn't refuse to reprise his role as Tom Hagen, the loyal, level-headed consigliere of the Corleone family, doomed "Part III" before the cameras even rolled. Duvall's coiled intensity was a key element in the first two "Godfather" movies. He was the outsider, the Irish-German adopted son of Vito Corleone. No, he didn't have Sicilian blood, but that allowed him to be the calm tactician while Sonny was out bada-binging his way through a full-scale war with the five families.

Every Duvall scene in these movies is perfect. The best involve Tom working to persuade someone that it's in their best interest to go along with the family's wishes. Sometimes it plays out smoothly, like when he talks Roman history with informant Frank Pentangeli in "Part II," letting him know that his family would be taken care of should he die. Sometimes it doesn't and there's a horse's head under your nice clean sheets. That's the nature of diplomacy. As Tom famously says, "This is business, not personal." And with Duvall stating it, how could you argue?

– Glenn Whipp

'Network' (1976)

Written by Paddy Chayefsky and directed by Sidney Lumet, this acidly funny satire of the TV news business is best remembered for Peter Finch's "I'm mad as hell" on-air breakdowns and Faye Dunaway's manic pursuit of ratings – performances that earned both of them Oscars. But Duvall works on a different frequency, making the corporate machinery of the network feel even more unsettling than the chaos on camera. As UBS executive Frank Hackett, he charges through meetings barking orders and treating morality as disposable: the cost of doing business. While others rant idealistically, Hackett keeps steering everything back to what will play with the affiliates and what the network can sell. Even the idea of killing an increasingly unhinged anchor becomes, in his hands, not an ethical crisis but a programming decision. Watching it now, the performance feels disturbingly prescient, offering a glimpse of the managerial mindset that would eventually reshape American media into a pure war for attention.

– Josh Rottenberg

'Apocalypse Now' (1979)

You know this performance well, but consider how much Duvall gets done in such a small amount of screen time. Kilgore's barrel-chested, stiff-backed swagger is the whole of American imperialism in a single posture. Strumming a guitar at an unlikely cookout deep in country, Duvall somehow manages to convey fearless confidence and a singular brand of well-armed bonhomie that has no equivalent in movies. (He's more like a "Catch-22" creation.) Kilgore leads his cavalry into air battle to the strains of Wagner, taking out combatants in between swigs of coffee. Later, he commands the boys to surf and the movie's surreal take on war snaps into place. Every one of his lines has become iconic, but Duvall's final moment in the film might be his most darkly funny and haunting: "Some day this war's going to end," he cryptically says. Then he walks away, untroubled.

– Joshua Rothkopf

'The Great Santini' (1979)

For some of us who grew up in the '70s and early '80s, "The Great Santini" was the first time Duvall's ferocity hit you where you lived. Adapted from Pat Conroy's autobiographical novel and set in 1962, the film casts the actor as Lt. Col. Wilbur "Bull" Meechum, a volatile Marine fighter pilot stationed with his family in Beaufort, South Carolina, who runs his household like a command post. At once grandiose and insecure, Meechum turns pickup basketball games into tests of will and teases his son Ben (Michael O'Keefe) to the edge of cruelty, wielding the self-bestowed nickname "the Great Santini" like a boast and a shield. Just two months after appearing as the swaggering Kilgore in "Apocalypse Now," Duvall offered a more intimate variation on a military man – essentially Kilgore without an actual war, just a domestic battlefield. "The Great Santini" struggled to find an audience – the studio fretted that the title sounded like a circus movie – but the performance earned Duvall his third Oscar nomination and confirmed he could carry a film on his uneasy balance between charm and menace.

– Josh Rottenberg

'Tender Mercies' (1983)

Duvall won his only Oscar for his role as a former country star slowly trying to rebuild his life after fading into obscurity due to his out-of-control drinking. Written by Horton Foote – an ongoing collaborator of Duvall's going back to the actor's film debut in "To Kill a Mockingbird" – "Tender Mercies" has a stripped-bare quality, a simplicity and directness that only places its complex emotions in stronger relief. Rather than the explosive fits of some of Duvall's other performances, there is a sustained sense of a man trying to control the turmoil within himself. In one of the film's most stirring moments, indicative of its quiet power, Duvall keeps his back to the camera as he sings a lullaby hymn only for himself. Drawing the audience in with just his pleading voice and vulnerable physicality, Duvall expresses a lifetime of regrets.

– Mark Olsen

'Falling Down' (1993)

The cop on his last day before retirement is a trope that needs to be sent out to pasture. After Robert Duvall in "Falling Down," who can top it? Michael Douglas has the sweatier, showier role as a hair-trigger depressive on a cathartic spree of L.A. destruction. We're tempted to root him on – and for a while, we do – but Duvall's wise and weary Sgt. Martin Prendergast simply won't let us turn Douglas' "D-Fens" into a hero. He steers the romantic violence back into reality, and despite the movie's slippery empathy for how D-Fens has been betrayed by the system (and Prendergast's own sour opinion of his bosses), he doesn't hesitate to insist that the man who just frightened his ex-wife and daughter with a gun is, in fact, the bad guy. As he vents at the climax, "They lie to everybody – they lie to the fish!"

– Amy Nicholson

'The Apostle' (1997)

Duvall threw himself body and soul into the galvanic cadences ("Holy Ghost power!") of Pentecostal preaching in order to summon this exhilarating performance, certainly among his best. His Sonny, a Texas evangel with a devoted flock, is deeply flawed – to watch the way his wife flinches when he approaches her tells its own sad backstory. But the movie has much more in store for its title character than a mere redemption arc. Duvall shades Sonny's run from the law into a nuanced portrayal of wounded pride and unanswerable questions. One of the many beauties of this indie is the way faith seems to be a renewable resource, even among strangers; it's a story about the transporting power of religion that anyone can appreciate. Consider, too, that Duvall also wrote the original script and directed it, and you'll realize that his full talent went deeper than most realized.

– Joshua Rothkopf

'The Judge' (2014)

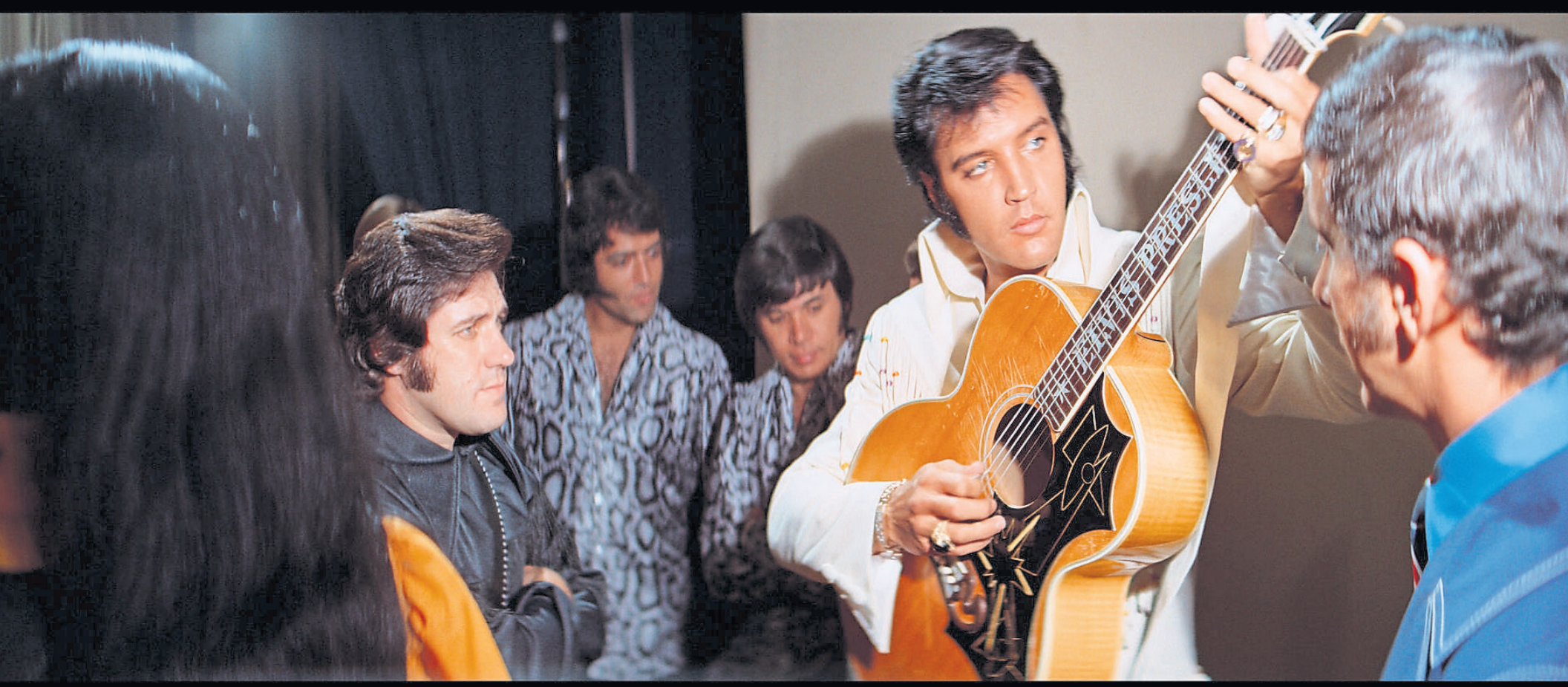
Robert Duvall earned seven Oscar nominations over the course of his celebrated career, the last for the 2014 legal drama "The Judge," a movie no one would have in the upper echelon of his filmography. But it is the one that put me in a theater with him and co-star Robert Downey Jr. for a Q&A following a screening – with Duvall being so gruffly funny that I nearly fell out of a director's chair several times. If you've seen "The Judge," you know there's a lot going on in this movie. There's a story about an estranged father (Duvall) and son (Downey). There's a criminal mystery involving the dad. There's a courtroom drama. There's a love story. There's a nod to the sublime, sugary pleasures found in a piece of Bit-O-Honey. It's unwieldy and imperfect but also at times quite moving thanks to the superlative work of its stars. Downey, a producer, said he saw the movie about 20 times and cried at the end of every viewing. Duvall had seen it twice. Did you cry, I asked him. "I didn't cry but I got moved," he answered. "Same thing." "I cried enough for both of us," Downey added. Duvall smiled. "I cried when I got paid." Spoken like a consummate working actor.

– Glenn Whipp

'Widows' (2018)

Continuing to act into his 80s and 90s, Duvall could convey full lives and experiences even in small supporting roles. In Steve McQueen's dynamic crime thriller, Duvall plays a Chicago politician who has long been a part of the local power structure attempting to hand things off to his son. He is plainly not a good man, with a casual racism and contempt for his own constituents, but in just a few scenes Duvall somehow gives the character a stalwart appeal, someone who sees himself as manning the barricades against impending societal change. In a moment with Colin Farrell as his preening son, Duvall is shocked and disappointed by how things are being handled. Unfurling a beautifully outrageous string of obscenities, Duvall threatens a beating, noting "And I can still do it, believe me." And not a single person watching would doubt the truth of that.

– Mark Olsen



Courtesy Neon / TNS

A scene from "EPiC: Elvis Presley in Concert."

MOVIE REVIEW

'EPiC: Elvis Presley in Concert' reanimates King of Rock and Roll

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

For a long time, the image of "Elvis in Vegas" has been a joke: the white jumpsuits, the sunglasses, the sideburns. It's meant more "Halloween costume" than "rock god" recently, but Baz Luhrmann is here to set the record straight.

While working on his sprawling 2022 biopic "Elvis," the filmmaker went searching for lost footage of the Elvis Presley concert films "Elvis: That's the Way It Is" and "Elvis on Tour," and discovered a treasure trove in the Warner Bros. vault – 59 hours of unseen film negative that he has now lovingly restored and edited into one of the best concert films of all time, "EPiC" (for "Elvis Presley in Concert"). If you've ever wished you could have seen Elvis in Vegas, now's your chance, and don't miss it on IMAX.

If you know Luhrmann, you know this is going to be a visual spectacle, almost a hallucinatory physical experience. The sheer vibrancy of the restored footage is stunning. Towards the end of the film, there's a close-up of Elvis, deeply tanned, white jumpsuit crisp, jet black hair falling over his brow, piercing blue eyes and lashes wet with sweat, set against a blazing fuchsia backdrop. It's simply one of the most powerfully erotic images ever put to screen. Luhrmann knows what he's doing.

"EPiC" isn't so much a concert film as is it as reanimation of the icon via filmmaking. He is the Dr. Frankenstein, bringing Elvis back to life on screen, making palpable the charisma and energy that drove audiences at the Las Vegas International Hotel into a sexual frenzy, as seen in montage of Elvis kissing all the overwhelmed women in the crowd.

But "EPiC" isn't just about reminding us how sexy Elvis was – though that's certainly a part of it. His hips managed to disrupt the entire social order of the 1950s for good reason, and they remain in fine, fluid form here. But the film is foremost a celebration of his talent, musical obsession, and skill as a live performer. The Vegas residency may have been a chance for his manager Colonel Tom Parker to milk as much money as he could from his client, but it's also clear that Elvis finds so much joy in performing, and that the concerts were a return to his roots after getting lost in so many Hollywood movies of questionable quality.

Luhrmann and editor/executive producer Jonathan Redmond skim through the necessary context (teen idol, military service, Hollywood) in rapid-fire montages before settling into the musical process, intercutting rehearsal and performance footage with snippets of songs from his band's 150 song-deep repertoire. If you've ever wanted to see Elvis sing Del Shannon's "Runaway," the Beatles' "Yesterday," or Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water," now's your chance. He also performs high-octane gospel songs like "How Great Thou Art," interpolates the Beatles' "Get Back" into his own "Little Sister" and connects the dots from his country, gospel, and rhythm and blues roots to the rock and roll of the 1960s and '70s throughout his set.

In rehearsals, Elvis is relaxed, goofy, but focused and diligent. On stage he is a man possessed, channeling something larger than himself, conducting his band and the audience with the smallest of gestures and looks. Luhrmann and Redmond craft sequences of rehearsal, performance, backstage footage and press conference interviews with Elvis that never lose the fidelity of the songs themselves.

Luhrmann acknowledges aspects of the star's personal life without abandoning the framework of the concert film. A sequence about the Colonel is set to "Devil in Disguise" and juxtaposes images of merchandise with audio of Elvis speaking about the Colonel, clearly oblivious to his manager's machinations. Another sequence features sweet home videos of Priscilla and Lisa Marie set to Elvis singing "You Were Always On My Mind."

Luhrmann doesn't need to tell Elvis' life story – he's already done that. But it's clear that he's not done examining what Elvis meant, and still means, for culture, as a symbol, an earthquake, an influence. At the end of "EPiC," Bono reads his 1995 poem "American David," describing the way Elvis shifted the center of gravity, made it "slippery." Double entendre aside, that's exactly what Elvis did, combining musical traditions across race, class and geographical lines, using his own telegenic charisma to bring that new creation to worldwide audiences, and shifting the planet off its axis in the process. Through his concerts, Luhrmann brings us all back to that truth as well, and in "EPiC," puts us right on stage with the King of Rock and Roll. It's an exhilarating cinematic experience, whether you're an Elvis fan or not – but Luhrmann makes sure you are by the end.

'Epic: Elvis Presley In Concert'

★★★ ½

MPA rating: PG-13 (for smoking and some language)

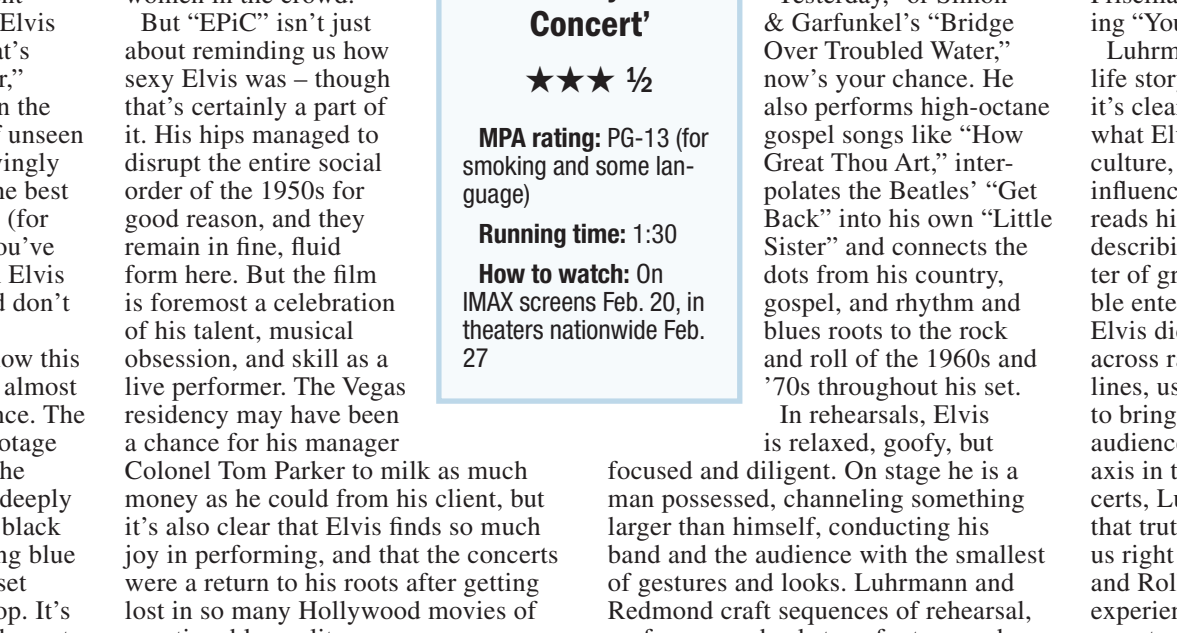
Running time: 1:30

How to watch: On IMAX screens Feb. 20, in theaters nationwide Feb. 27

MOVIE REVIEW

Glen Powell's charisma in *'How to Make a Killing'* can't save this disappointment

By MOIRA MACDONALD
The Seattle Times (TNS)



A24 / TNS

Glen Powell in the movie "How To Make a Killing."

Becket Redfellow (Glen Powell) is no ordinary convicted man on death row, and not just because he wears a satin slumber mask with his prison coveralls. The story he tells, to a visiting priest (Adrian Lukis), is an astonishing one: how he, born to a obscenely rich family yet shut out of its fortunes, schemed to bump off every relative standing in the way of a vast inheritance.

This is the premise, spelled out in its opening minutes, of John Patton Ford's "How to Make a Killing," and it's a promising one; unfortunately, even Powell's charismatic presence – this actor never met a camera he couldn't charm; see him in Netflix's "Hit Man" if you doubt me – can't make up for the fact that this dark comedy/thriller needs more comedy, and more thrills.

It's a disappointment, as on paper this one looked like a lot of fun. The cast is appealing: Ed Harris as Becket's estranged father; Topher Grace, Bill Camp and an amusingly dim Zach Woods among the assortment of relatives on Becket's to-do list; Margaret Qualley as a femme fatale from Becket's past. But most of them don't get much screen time – the structure of the story means that as soon as we get to know a character, he or she is likely to disappear, and honestly I started losing track of who was in line to go – and Qualley in particular seems as if she's in a different movie, her very stylized, arch performance at odds with Powell's trademark breeziness.

Powell's charm, along with some fun rich-person interiors (there's a library near the end that gives a stellar performance), does a lot to get "How to Make a Killing" to the finish line. But you may well lose interest, as I did, before the murder countdown concludes; this one feels more like a rough draft than a truly well-thought-out movie. Throughout, there are intriguing little glimmers of what might have been. At one point, somebody asks Becket if he can keep a secret, and the sly, low-key spin Powell puts on "Surprisingly well, actually" is almost worth the popcorn price right there. He's truly a movie star; file this one under missed opportunities.

'How to Make a Killing'

★★

MPA rating: R (for language and some violence/bloody images)

Running time: 1:45

How to watch: In theaters

Courtesy of Netflix

"America's Next Top Model" Cycle 1 contestants, clockwise from far left, Nicole Panattoni, Adrienne Curry, Elyse Sewell, Kesse Wallace, Robin Manning, Giselle Samson, Shannon Stewart and Ebony Haith in "Reality Check."

'Reality Check: America's Next Top Model' directors on Tyra Banks interview and more takeaways

By MALIA MENDEZ
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Fashion photographer Nigel Barker was one of the original judges on "America's Next Top Model."

At its heart, "America's Next Top Model" was Tyra Banks' show. She originated the canonical reality series' concept, assembled its core cast and anchored its production for 23 cycles, which first aired on UPN before it became the CW.

But " Reality Check," a new Netflix docuseries now streaming that examines "ANTM" and its checkered history through the accounts of those who were a part of it, is not affiliated with Banks. In fact, the supermodel turned media personality wasn't invited to take the hot seat until well after production on the docuseries began, said Daniel Sivan, who co-directed "Reality Check" with his wife, Mor Loushy.

"It was like, 'Hey, this can be a great addition, but definitely not a necessity,'" Sivan said. Luckily for the directors, Banks eventually agreed to an interview, which Loushy said clocked in at about four hours and wound up giving the series a richer texture.

"People talking trash about her is very easy to find," Sivan said. "But having her passion, bringing this program to life, is something that only she could tell."

For Sivan and Loushy, whose filmography leans sociopolitical, the pop-culture-centric "Reality Check" seems a departure. But Loushy said that she stewarded this project with the same care that she did the duo's acclaimed 2025 docuseries " American Manhunt: Osama bin Laden."

"I felt the journey is more or less the same because there were difficult issues. There were things that were sensitive and important for me," Loushy said, from the harassment "ANTM" contestants endured to the insecurities that "to us as women, are sitting tight and hard every day on our heart."

For Sivan, the allure of "ANTM" as a documentary subject lay in the tragic arc of Banks and her fellow crew members, whom the director said set out with positive intentions to empower women and promote representation for other marginalized people in the fashion industry. Then, he said, as the show evolved, "these misfits became bullies."

"At the end of the day, was it a force of good, or was it a force of evil? I hope people keep debating that," Sivan said.

"Really, the doc doesn't end with the credits," he added. "It ends with the conversations it will spark."

Here are seven takeaways from "Reality Check" that are sure to drive those conversations.

Shandi Sullivan implies she was sexually assaulted

The penultimate episode of "ANTM" Cycle 2 dedicates much of its runtime to a plotline that is framed as contestant Shandi Sullivan cheating on her boyfriend Eric with a male model during a visit to Milan.

The way Sullivan explains it in the first and second episode of "Reality Check," the then-21-year-old was under the influence of alcohol. The night began with drinks and led to a group hot tub dip, where she and the male model started getting physical. Later, footage shows the two in the shower and in bed, but Sullivan says that she had "blacked out," the cameras kept rolling and "no one did anything to stop it."

"After getting out of the hot tub and whatever happened after that," Sullivan says, "I think they should've ... been like, 'All right, this has gone too far. Like, we got to, we got to pull her out of this.'"

The show's executive producer Ken Mok says their job was to capture, not to intervene: "We treated 'Top Model' as a documentary, and we told the girls that."

Similarly, when Cycle 4 contestant Keenyah Hill informed the judges that a male model had groped her repeatedly during a photo shoot, Banks encouraged her to learn to stick up for herself.

Eating disorders were rampant on set and contestants were pressured into cosmetic work

Hill was also repeatedly shamed about her weight and physical appearance, with former supermodel Janice Dickinson instructing her to better hide her stomach during photo shoots. Dickinson was known to share strong opinions that veered negative and even mean-spirited on the judging panel.

Like Hill, many other girls were criticized for their weight and advised to restrict their eating to better approximate a model's physique; thus, eating disorders were common among contestants, says Bre Scullark, who appeared in Cycle 5, in the documentary. After a fainting spell, model Heather Kuzmich was told by a medic that she had to eat the next day. "I think I just pushed myself way past my limit," she said in a confessional.

Producers also pressured Cycle 6 contestants Joanie Dodds and Dani Evans into undergoing invasive dental procedures that focused on cosmetic rather than health improvements. Evans strongly protested removing her signature tooth gap but gave in when Banks essentially gave her an ultimatum: Get rid of the gap or go home.

"The girls were awarded and applauded for putting their health on the backburner," journalist Zakiya Gibbons says in the documentary.

In kind, the docuseries shows Mok during an appearance on "The Inner View" saying "the biggest disaster ever is always the best thing. People have 104-degree temperature. They're throwing up. They need IVs. That's the best news I could ever have."

Producers mined models' files to create drama

When Cycle 8 contestant Dionne Walters was a child, her mother was shot and paralyzed from the waist down. Nonetheless, during her season's crime-themed photo shoot – one of the series' most controversial shoots, alongside the "race-swap" photo shoots during Cycles 4 and 13 – Walters was memorably portrayed as a shooting victim, sporting a bullet wound in her head.

"I thought it was a coincidence at the time, but I don't think it was," Walters says in the documentary, adding that her mother's accident was in her application. The model was critiqued by the judging panel for not exhibiting much emotion in her photos.

"I'm just glad they didn't get the reaction that I feel like they were hoping to get," she says.

Mok in the documentary concedes, "I take full responsibility for that shoot. That was a mistake… That one, I look back and I'm like, 'You were an idiot.'"

Banks' rant at Tiffany Richardson became a meme, but it was not funny

In the years since it aired, Banks' infamous tirade, "I was rooting for you! We were all rooting for you!", directed at model Tiffany Richardson, has been parodied by countless users online and even on "Ru Paul's Drag Race." But the day it happened, former "ANTM" judge and fashion photographer Nigel Barker said no one was laughing.

"Tyra really scared all of us. We literally jumped out of our seats," Barker said. After shooting the scene, production staff escorted Banks off set, "ANTM" alum Jay Manuel added. Banks admits she "went too far. You know, I lost it."

According to Manuel, not everything Banks said that day was televised and Nolé Marin, a stylist and judge on the show, says lawyers were brought to set after that.

Banks and 'The Jays' didn't end on good terms

Over time, Manuel said he began to feel uncomfortable with Banks' insistence that "ANTM" needed to constantly reinvent, even at the expense of their original mission to uplift young models.

When the media personality finally worked up the courage to quit, he said Banks gave him the cold shoulder. Even though he ended up staying on another 10 cycles, the pair's relationship never recovered. In the documentary, Banks declined to speak about Manuel, insisting instead that she should call him on her own. (To Sivan and Loushy's knowledge, she still hasn't.)

Years after Manuel tried to leave "ANTM," he was cut along with Barker and J. Alexander, after the head of the CW network told Banks and Mok they needed to make a change. While the three men still keep in touch, Banks is no longer in their orbit. And after J. Alexander, who also goes by Miss J, suffered a life-altering stroke, she never paid him a hospital visit.

Winners rarely found success in the industry after the show

Banks promised models a jumpstart into the fashion industry. Yet even "ANTM" winners rarely managed to sustain modeling careers after exiting the show.

Evans, the contestant who was coerced into closing her tooth gap, said a fellow model once relayed to her a conversation with her agent, where she was told, "We have to treat Dani differently because she came from 'Top Model.'" Later, Evans learned Banks for years stood idly by as the young model was passed over for opportunities.

"I always rode the fence with you," Evans recalled Banks confessing to her, adding, "They built a whole empire, a multi-million dollar brand, known as 'America's Next Top Model' off the backs of every girl's dream that did that show."

Banks says she is not done yet with 'ANTM'

Despite everything, from the years of backlash to the personal confrontations she's had with former contestants, Banks in the documentary still had her mind on rebooting "ANTM."

"I feel like my work is not done," Banks said. "You have no idea what we have planned for Cycle 25."

No new seasons of the show have been announced as of the documentary's release.

BOOKS

simonkr / Getty Images

LOVE 'HEATED RIVALRY'?

7 more hockey romance books to check out

By JACKIE VARRIANO
The Seattle Times (TNS)

If your social media feeds are anything like mine, they've been filled with videos, memes and more about "Heated Rivalry," the hit show based on the second book of the same name in Rachel Reid's hockey romance series "Game Changers." "Heated Rivalry" follows star hockey players Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov, who go on a yearslong journey from rivals to lovers.

I know I'm not alone, because Kate Sellers, technical and collections services manager for The Seattle Public Library, says "Heated Rivalry" has undergone a sharp uptick in hold requests since the show premiered on Nov. 28.

When we spoke, the e-book version had 1,183 holds on 163 copies. The audiobook is in the library's Always Available collection, meaning patrons can get it at any time. There were also 134 holds on the paper book, but Sellers says they've been waiting on additional copies to be shipped from a vendor to help meet demand.

But never fear, if you're looking to delve further into the world of hockey romance, there are plenty of books beyond the "Game Changers" series to explore. Read on to find seven books that will help further fuel any burgeoning hockey romance obsession. (P.S. If you just can't get enough of Shane and Ilya, the show was renewed for a second season, and Reid announced a third installment featuring those characters, titled "Unrivaled," due this fall.)

For readers who love a TV adaptation

"The Deal" by Elle Kennedy. First published in 2015, Kennedy's "The Deal" is in production with a (still-to-be-announced) 2026 release date on Prime Video. The book is the first in Kennedy's "Off-Campus" series and centers on college hockey captain Garrett Graham and music major Hannah Wells at the fictional Briar University.

The "deal" comes in when Garrett seeks tutoring help from Hannah. In exchange, he'll help her snag the attention of her crush. This is a cute friends-to-lovers story with great character development. Garrett is no one-note dumb jock, and there's more to Hannah than her prim exterior. While both characters are battling past demons, the way they come together in support of one another is swoon-worthy.

This book has a few explicit open-door scenes, ranking it between a three and four out of five on the chili pepper scale, but "The Deal" is fairly tame in the world of Kennedy's level of spice.

For readers glued to the Winter Olympics

"Skate It Till You Make It" by Rufaro Faith Mazarura. On New Year's Eve, Ari Shumba – the newly appointed women's ice hockey captain for Team Great Britain – meets aspiring photographer Drew Dlamini at a party just minutes before the ball drops. Thinking they'll never see each other again, the two spill all their red flags, being more honest with a stranger than they've been with friends or family, and sharing a passionate kiss at midnight.

Months later, Ari is on the ice at the Winter Olympics while Drew is there taking photos, and fate throws them together again. Even though they had already agreed a romance between them wouldn't work when they first met on New Year's Eve, this sweet, closed-door (0 on the chili pepper scale) romance takes readers on a journey that shows good things can happen when you lay your cards on the table and let people in.

For readers who like hockey as a vehicle for storytelling, but not as a main plot point

"The Wild Card" by Stephanie Archer. "Wild Card" is Archer's fifth book in her "Vancouver Storm" series. Each installment centers on a player from the fictional Vancouver, B.C., pro hockey team and their love interest. Book five pairs head coach Tate Ward with Jordan Hathaway, a fiery bartender who also happens to be the estranged daughter of the Storm's owner. When Jordan's dad threatens to sell the team, Tate recruits Jordan – who, despite her rocky relationship with her dad, still loves the team – as the team's general manager in an effort to stop the sale.

Both characters are intensely private, and they've both made huge (incorrect) assumptions about each other. Watching them have to work together while unraveling those assumptions proves to be downright delightful. This slow-burn book rates between a two and a three on the spice scale.

For readers looking for a queer sports romance

"Wake Up, Nat & Darcy" by Kate Cochrane. It's too simple to say "Wake Up, Nat & Darcy" is merely the sapphic version of "Heated Rivalry." Yes, we're dealing with former hockey teammates turned adversaries in Darcy LaCroix and Natalie Carpenter – but other than hockey and the Olympics as a backdrop, the only other thing these two books share is a spotlight on how miscommunication and assumptions can change everything.

Darcy is a three-time Olympic gold-winning Canadian women's hockey player turned broadcast journalist, while Natalie was just cut from the U.S. women's hockey team, leaving her dreams of another Olympic medal in the dust. When a guest hosting gig at Darcy's network comes up, the duo is paired in a series of athletic stunts with Olympic athletes, and sparks fly. However, it's not immediately apparent if those sparks will end up burning down everything Darcy has worked for or if the flames will turn into something more romantic.

Fans of miscommunication will love the heated banter between Darcy and Natalie. This book rates a high two on the chili pepper scale with mild open-door scenes.

For readers who appreciate mental illness representation

"Unbound" by Peyton Corinne. Set for an April 7 release, "Unbound" is the third book in "The Undone" series. Like the first two in the series ("Unsteady," "Unloved"), "Unbound" follows a college hockey phenom at the fictional East Coast college Waterfell.

Meet Bennett Reiner, the team's neurodivergent goalie struggling to maintain control over his OCD, anxiety and autism. His love interest, the guarded Paloma Blake, is also hiding some deep trauma behind her party girl exterior. Corinne uses flashbacks to take readers on a trip through Paloma and Bennett's three-year relationship, showing us where they started and how they arrived at a messy present.

This is an emotionally turbulent story with hockey at its periphery and steamy, open-door scenes sprinkled throughout (3.5 on the chili pepper scale). There are also a fair amount of trigger warnings in the book to pay attention to for readers sensitive to compulsive behaviors, panic attacks and childhood trauma.

For readers who want a heavier dose of hockey

"Thrown for a Loop" by Sarina Bowen. Zoe Carson and Chase Merritt have history. Now, Zoe is a recent divorcee and recovering Olympic figure skater looking for a new start as a skating coach for the fictional NHL New York Legends team. Chase is a player who has lost his mojo on the ice. But 10 years ago? They were skating camp counselors deeply in love for one fleeting summer.

Zoe is on the hunt not only to get a full-time contract with the Legends, but to mend fences with the boy who broke her heart all those years ago. This book drills down on skating technique and mechanics while still being fun and fresh. It ranks as a three on the chili pepper scale with a few open-door love scenes and some moderately spicy language.

"Evening the Score" by Lexi LaFleur Brown. Scheduled for a May 26 release, "Evening the Score" will have you laughing out loud at the banter and shenanigans between star NHL player Brody Parker and (temporary) team mascot/former college hockey player Olivia Hinckley.

Olivia's former NHL player dad, Kevin, lost his contract in the league because of a CTE-causing concussion from a dirty hit. Brody's dad, Erik Parker, was the cocky player who delivered the blow. Now, seven years after Kevin's death, Brody signs a contract with Kevin's former team, the Minnesota Freeze, and Olivia decides to launch a plan for revenge.

This hilarious secret identity, fake dating, enemies-to-lovers romance has plenty of hockey stats and hockey-related banter alongside good queer and Indigenous representation, chef's kiss character growth and a couple open-door steamy scenes that place it at a solid three on the chili pepper scale.

BESTSELLERS

Here are the bestsellers for the week that ended Saturday, Feb. 7, compiled from data from independent and chain bookstores, book wholesalers and independent distributors nationwide, powered by Circana BookScan.

Hardcover fiction

1. The Correspondent. Virginia Evans. Crown
2. Stolen in Death. J.D. Robb. St. Martin's
3. The Complete Novels of Jane Austen. Jane Austen. Canterbury Classics
4. It's Not Her. Mary Kubica. Park Row
5. Half His Age. Jennette McCurdy. Ballantine
6. Isles of the Emberdark. Brandon Sanderson. Tor
7. The Widow. John Grisham. Doubleday
8. Alchemised. SenLinYu. Del Rey
9. Metal Slinger. Rachel Schneider. Saturday
10. The Secret of Secrets. Dan Brown. Doubleday

Hardcover nonfiction

1. The U.S. Constitution and Other Writings. Canterbury Classics
2. Stop, in the Name of God. Charlie Kirk. Winning Team
3. Well Endowed. Vivian Tu. Harper Wave
4. The Invisible Coup. Peter Schweizer. Harper
5. Rage and the Republic. Jonathan Turley. Simon & Schuster
6. The Great Train Heist. Michael J. Coffino. Skyhorse
7. The Forever Strong Playbook. Gabrielle Lyon. Atria
8. Nobody's Girl. Virginia Roberts Giuffre. Knopf
9. How to Test Negative for Stupid. John Kennedy. Broadside
10. La Lucci. Susan Lucci. Blackstone

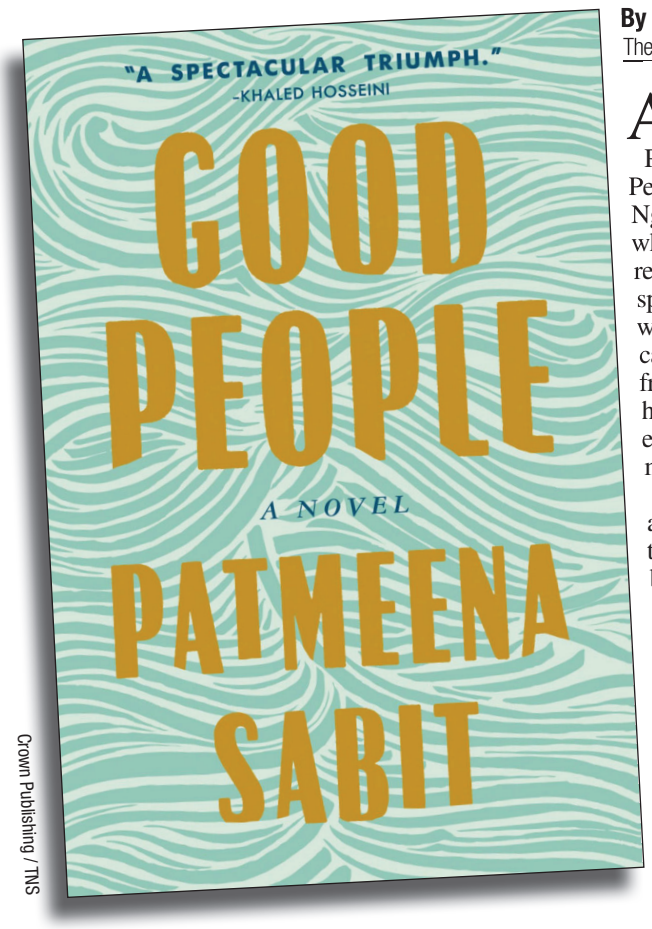
Trade paperback

1. Dear Debbie. Freida McFadden. Poisoned Pen
2. Theo of Golden. Allen Levi. Atria
3. Woman Down. Colleen Hoover. Montlake
4. Just for the Cameras. Meghan Quinn. Bloom
5. Dungeon Crawler Carl. Matt Dinniman. Ace
6. Absolute Batman Vol. 2. Scott Snyder. DC
7. A Killing Cold. Kate Alice Marshall. Pine & Cedar
8. Dandadan, Vol. 17. Yukinobu Tatsu. Viz
9. The God of the Woods. Liz Moore. Riverhead
10. Kagurabachi, Vol. 6. Takeru Hokazono. Viz

Reprinted from Publishers Weekly.

REVIEW

'Good People' is the year's first great novel



Crown Publishing / TNS

By CHRIS HEWITT
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

A month into the year, the first great novel of 2026 is here.

Patmeena Sabit's debut, "Good People," may remind readers of Celeste Ng's bestselling " Little Fires Everywhere " in that it's a domestic tale that reads like a propulsive thriller and springs from a clash of cultures. Sabit writes about the Sharaf family, who came to the Washington, D.C., area from Afghanistan and have become hugely successful – until tragedy erases all the progress they think they've made.

"Good People" takes the form of an investigation. We never hear from the Sharafs – father Rahmat, who built a business empire from nothing; devoted mother Maryam; son Omer, a budding entrepreneur; stunning daughter Zorah, who chafes at her family's rules; and two little-seen younger children. Sabit presents us with dozens of eyewitness accounts from neighbors, friends, law enforcement and news media, all of whom attempt to understand a tragedy that's revealed about one-third of the way through the book.

It's riveting stuff, in part because the picture of the Sharafs is so complex as readers try to assemble the dozens of narrators' accounts into a whole picture (and an explanation for the tragedy).

Most observers think the Sharafs triumphed over long odds. Some believe they turned their back on Afghan culture. Some claim they knew all along about fractures in the family. Others believed the Sharafs lived a fairy tale. All are stunned by secrets that eventually emerge.

A key theme of "Good People" is the cultural schism the Sharafs weather; the parents are proud of how successfully their children navigate American customs but often baffled by the behavior of Zorah, in particular. She considers herself American, but her parents cling to the way things worked in Afghanistan and expect her to observe practices they grew up with, including arranged marriages and filial piety. Early in the book, it becomes clear those tensions will explode somehow, which they do when Zorah dates a young man her father disapproves of, as described by a family friend:

"In [Afghanistan], a thousand men would have stood with [Rahmat]. They would have dragged that bastard through the streets by his greasy head and buried him alive and then buried his father and brothers on top of him as a lesson to his whole tribe. They would have had that girl back under her father's roof before the sun went down on the day she ran away. God, custom, the law – everything would have been on his side. But here? Here he was the guilty one."

That's one of the more extreme views, but I kept changing my mind about who was in the right as I read, for instance, Zorah's social worker's sympathetic account of a disagreement with her family alongside her friend's increasingly concerned narrative. A key to the success of this is how deftly Sabit captures dozens of voices, ranging from old country friends who use Afghan idioms ("they were going to crawl into our eyes," meaning "try to convince us not to believe what we're seeing") and reporters who seem to know more than their just-the-facts accounts can reveal.

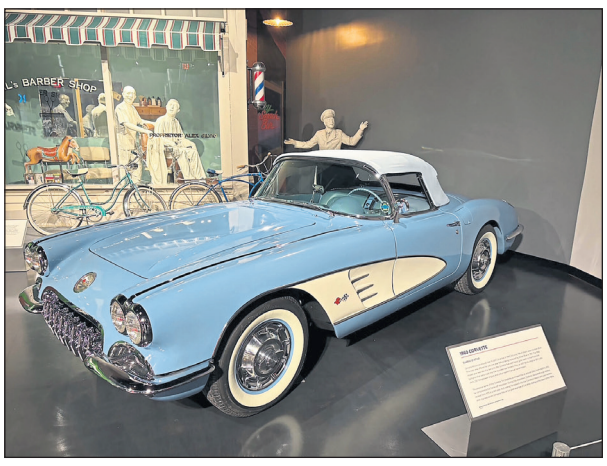
In the end, a big question is whether the Sharafs can be both Afghans and Americans. A family friend says the tragedy is that Rahmat Sharaf believed he had become the latter: "He thought he could buy back his name with his millions. That people would look the other way because in this country there's always in all things a difference between a poor man and a rich man. Or maybe he was just like the bird that buries its head in the sand."

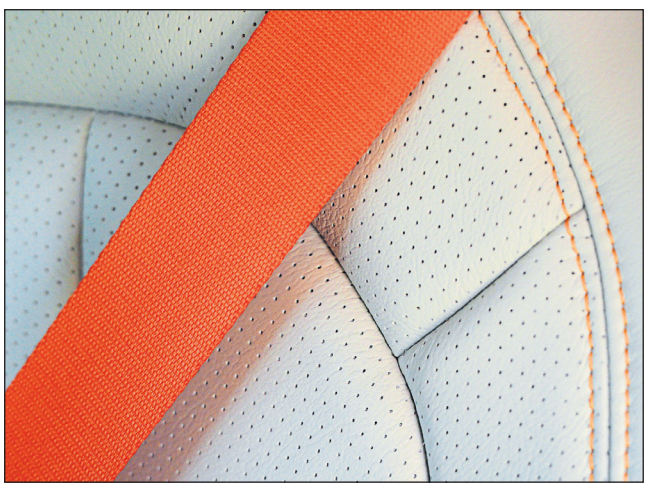
AUTOMOTIVE

The Color Studio at the National Corvette Museum in Bowling Green, Kentucky.
Casey Williams / TNS

THE SURPRISING INSPIRATION FOR *car colors*

By CASEY WILLIAMS
Tribune News Service (TNS)





TOP LEFT: A 1969 Chevrolet Chevelle SS 396 Sport Coupe.
General Motors / TNS
TOP RIGHT: A 1960 Corvette.
Casey Williams / TNS
BOTTOM LEFT: Chrysler Pacifica concept interior featuring orange seatbelts.
Stellantis / TNS
BOTTOM RIGHT: Detail of the Mercedes Maybach colors Nordic Glow over White.
Mercedes-Benz / TNS

In an episode of "Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee," Jerry Seinfeld picks up Jimmy Fallon in a Cascade Green 1956 Corvette that appears turquoise in the summer sun. Seinfeld declares it "absolutely the essence of American futuristic positivism of the post-war society at that time."

Fallon riffs: "That's a beautiful thing. It's beautiful. This is just gorgeous, and the color. What happened with cars? Where did they stop making colors like this?"

Casting off the danger and drudgery of the war years, 1950s Americans were feeling optimistic. And, they relished the modernism of America's be-finned, be-chromed and blindingly be-hued automobiles.

By the fiscally restrained 1970s, dowdy nature-inspired colors were back. It was depressing, unless you drove a Dodge, Jeep or Corvette. By contrast, European automakers offered a kaleidoscope of colors.

In these challenging times, drivers are choosing somber shades again, but also expressing some surprising mid-century-fueled emotion. Determining what colors buyers will desire is not easy, but automakers have their ways.

A starting point is automotive paint supplier BASF's "Color Report 2025 for Automotive OEM Coatings."

"In 2025, the global automotive color landscape reflects a clear shift toward individuality and nature-inspired aesthetics," said Mark Gutjahr, global head of automotive color design at BASF. "Green emerges as the strongest growing chromatic signal worldwide. Gray records a significant increase. White shows a slight decline and black remains strong. This development combines timeless elegance with expressive diversity."

As in the 1970s, preferences vary across global markets.

"Colors often reflect cultural values and evoke emotional needs," Gutjahr continued. "Europe favors sophisticated grays and blues while Asia-Pacifica leans toward whites and tech-inspired metallics. North America increasingly embraces bold blues, reds and greens, especially with a focus on texture and effect.

Expect more natural shades as we drive toward 2027. Gutjahr predicts green will remain popular while warm neutrals like light and vivid browns will emerge. Look for more gray variations too.

Victoria Pogetto, Letty Russell and Lisa Kelly of the Lexus color and trim team would likely agree.

"Core colors of black, white, gray and silver are always popular, but we are thrilled to see more color," Team Lexus said. "Green is slowly coming back, and we are seeing many variations including bright greens and more silver-tinted greens. We are also seeing fresh effects such as colors that shift and others that have a frosted appearance."

Assessing and predicting automotive color trends takes broad and deep analysis.

"New colors are worked on years in advance," Team Lexus said. "Therefore, to help us understand the future we explore macro-societal trends. We use this as a framework to look at upcoming societal shifts and behaviors and how this will impact colors going forward."

Inputs like race relations, economies, power and leadership, health, climate change, resource scarcity and technology are all mentioned as influences. Historical colors play into it, but you might be surprised where else designers find inspiration.

"Overall, we are seeing an openness to color, which allows us the opportunity to create more unique colors," Team Lexus continued. "Footwear and packaging are two categories that are always interesting to watch for how color and materials are used in design."

It's similar at Stellantis, which includes the brands Fiat, Jeep, Dodge, Ram and Chrysler domestically.

"We attend trend shows, not just automotive," said La Shirl Turner, head of advanced color and materials at Stellantis. "We attend fashion shows, but also outdoor sporting and furniture shows. It goes back to everything has influence, even everyday products. It's how we separate the trend influence to make it automotive-capable that's challenging."

There's no shame in looking to the past for inspiration as some classic tints seem so fresh as to be new.

Mercedes dips into China Blue, a light hue from the '70s seemingly taken from the canals of Venice. Its all-capable G-Wagen is available in a studio of hues ranging from army greens to bright Hyper Blue Magno matte finish. Maybach encourages two-tone schemes with metallic emerald or mauve over white.

Corvettes always look good in red, but today's Roswell Green Metallic, Sebring Orange and Hysteria Purple would look correct in 1973. Bright Riptide Blue Metallic is more today. On the opposite end of the Chevy spectrum is the 2027 Bolt EV that's available in Marina Blue, a staple color on Chevelles and Novas throughout the 1960s.

Unlike in previous eras, there's an interplay that allows automakers to reimagine historic colors while simultaneously conjuring new ones.

"I feel like there will always be a push for innovation," Turner said. "We will always have core colors, but also a push for non-traditional colors. Dodge and Wrangler can wear any color; customers want these colors."

You could get a 1970 Plymouth Barracuda in vivacious Lime Light, Blue Fire, In Violet and Vitamin C – heritage-blazing trails for Jeep's orange "Joose," purple "Rain" and green "Mojito." The Wrangler 85th Anniversary edition comes in white with blue wheels and plaid interior, while Dodge Chargers wear Peel Out orange and Bludicrous that recall muscle car glory days.

"We have a heritage fan base," Turner said. "Color leaves an impression, draws people in, communicates what the vehicle wants to be. Use of color and materials feeds the souls of our customers."

Turner points to the electric Jeep Recon that was influenced by tactical gear and backpacks. The recent Chrysler Pacifica Grizzly Peak minivan concept wears matte-finish paint and cement gray leather seats with orange seatbelts.

"Colors play a vital role in the process of end consumers making decisions," Gutjahr said. "Colors represent a brand, create identity and also evoke a sense of zeitgeist, meaning that products live in the time they are created, and with the best intention to stay for a long time without being outdated."

And often, the past informs the future.

"Retro colors from the 1970s and pastels from the 1950s are great starting points," said Team Lexus. "The variation in greens and blues allows for room to experiment and to draw from nature. We are lucky that we get to work with color palettes and not have to select only one."

Casey Williams is an Indianapolis-based automotive journalist and a long-time contributor to the Chicago Tribune. He can be reached at AutoCasey@aol.com and on YouTube @AutoCasey.

AUTO REVIEWS

Can the 2026 Audi A6 Quattro sedan win over a nation of SUV drivers?

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service (TNS)

A November 2025 YouGov poll says 40 percent of Americans drive SUVs, making them the nation's favorite vehicle, while sedans trail at 30 percent. Which raises a fair question: how did a machine designed for cattle, combat and the apocalypse become the go-to for grocery runs?

SUVs exist for one reason: People like sitting higher than other people. It's the illusion of dominance at a traffic light and the fantasy that you'll someday need to conquer a curb. In real driving, sedans do the job honestly, while SUVs play rugged dress-up. Cars belong on roads. SUVs look like mobile shipping containers with all of the appeal of – well – a shipping container.

None will ever look as lovely as the all-new 2026 Audi A6, a stoically beautiful sedan designed and built with the same unemotional efficiency you'd expect from a nation that alphabetizes its socks.

Underpinning the all-new 2026 Audi A6 sedan is something the automaker calls the Premium Platform Combustion architecture, a name that suggests engineering prowess and a marketing department paid by the syllable. Inside the new A6, screens dominate the A6's instrument panel the way televisions once dominated American living rooms. You get an 11.9-inch digital instrument cluster, a 14.5-inch infotainment touchscreen, and a 10.9-inch touchscreen for the front passenger, thoughtfully designed so the driver can't see it while the car is moving to prevent ill-timed YouTube binges at 70 mph. There's also a configurable head-up display, bringing fighter-pilot optics to your windshield.

Then there's the optional Bang & Olufsen 3D Premium Sound System, which is worth every penny, mostly because once you hear it, you'll stop worrying about the price and start wondering how a car has managed to improve music itself. The dashboard is trimmed in Alcantara and an ambitious amount of black plastic. It looks terrific for about five minutes. After that, it begins collecting fingerprints and dust, guaranteeing that you'll keep a microfiber cloth on hand at all times, dutifully polishing the interior like a museum guard,

Photos by Audi / TNS

The A6 Premium comes standard with three-zone automatic climate control. Step up to the Premium Plus or Prestige trims and Audi ups the ante with four-zone automatic climate control, ensuring that every occupant can enjoy a personally curated microclimate, and proving that, as a nation, we can't even agree on the correct temperature. There's about as much room as you'd expect, although the cabin feels wider than its 74 inches suggests. The Sport Plus seats are on the firm side, but in a reassuring, orthopedic way and remain surprisingly comfortable even after long stints in the saddle. Best of all, the cabin stays impressively quiet, serenely insulated from road surfaces so bad they appear to have been paved by a committee that hates drivers. Still, the hard sides of the center console will definitely displease long-legged drivers, and it feels out of place in a luxury sedan.

Under the hood lives a 3.0-liter turbocharged V-6, which sends its power through a seven-speed dual-clutch transmission and to standard Quattro all-wheel drive. After all, grip is next to godliness. This year the driveline produces a robust 362 horsepower and 406 pound-feet of torque. The result is a 0-60 mph time of 4.5 seconds, which is quick enough to alarm your passengers while remaining socially acceptable. Top speed is electronically limited to 130 mph, a sensible precaution once the state trooper catches up.

The 2026 Audi 6 Sport model strikes that rare balance where the suspension is firm but not punishing, with just enough compliance and body lean to remind you that comfort still matters. The steering ratio feels spot-on, the brakes are perfectly weighted, and the engine keeps itself to a distant, well-bred growl, as if it's clearing its throat rather than shouting. The overall demeanor is pure grand tourer, leaning slightly toward the athletic side, but always impeccably mannered. It does exactly what you ask, when you ask, without a committee of electronic safety nannies stepping in to question your judgment or call your parents.

2026 Audi A6 Quattro sedan

Base price: $64,100
Engine: Turbocharged DOHC 3.0-liter V-6
Horsepower/Torque: 362/406 pound-feet
EPA rating (combined city/highway): 23 mpg
Fuel required: Premium
Length/Width/Height: 197/74/57 inches
Ground clearance: 5.5-7.3 inches
Payload: 1,102 pounds
Cargo capacity: 13.5 cubic feet
Towing capacity: Not available

Non-Sport models are far more middle of the road, in the literal and philosophical sense, though most of the A6's athleticism remains intact. Big bumps are handled with greater tolerance and less complaint, but the price you pay is noticeably more body roll in corners, enough to remind you that this version prefers civilized progress to enthusiastic misbehavior. It's less eager to play, more inclined to cruise, and perfectly happy letting you believe that was your plan all along.

Still, either version makes a fine choice in the luxury-sedan arena, a segment so crowded with worthy contenders it resembles a diplomatic reception for overachievers. The A6 squares off against the BMW 5-Series, Genesis G80, Lexus ES, and Mercedes-Benz E-Class, all of them eager to dazzle you with some defining quirk or philosophical stance. The Audi's defining trait, however, is that it largely refuses to audition. If it lacks the sharper personality of some rivals, that's precisely the point. There's nothing radical here, just a competent update of Audi's popular sedan. The A6 doesn't demand your attention or insist on being loved. It simply gets everything right, quietly and competently, which in a class full of extroverts may be the most confident move of all.

Larry Printz is an automotive journalist based in South Florida.

Dodge Charger Sixpack is a hot hatch for all seasons

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

In the midst of another Michigan snowstorm, I slid my 2026 550-horsepower Dodge Charger onto Woodard Avenue, toggled WET/SNOW mode and churned toward Huntington Place for the Detroit Auto Show, the adaptive-cruise control system helping maintain distance to traffic ahead.

Payne, have you gone mad? Driving a Charger muscle car in the snow?

Reset everything you know about the Charger. The 2025 Detroit News Vehicle of the Year picked up 2026 North American Car of the Year to open the Detroit Auto Show, and earned its praise as I flogged it all over town during show week.

All hail the new King of the Hot Hatches, the all-wheel-drive 2026 Dodge Charger Sixpack.

Hot hatches, of course, are my favorite auto segment. Fun, utilitarian and affordable (more on that later), they are the best all-around vehicles in the industry. I owned the OG – the 1984 Volkswagen Rabbit GTI (aka, Golf GTI) – and have worshipped at the hot hatch altar ever since. My passion has even rubbed off on my sons, who own a modern Golf GTI and Mazda 3 Turbo. Traditionally, the class has been ruled by compact cars, from the $30K Honda Civic Si to the $55K Acura Integra Type S.

Now the Charger Sixpack stretches the boundaries of hot hatch class with a full-size $50K coupe and sedan. Oh, joy.

With all-wheel drive, the Dodge delivers where the front-wheel-drive Integra Type S falls short. The Dodge matches the all-season fun of the reigning King of the Hot Hatches – the sensational, $51K VW Golf R – but with more rear legroom and jaw-dropping good looks.

If Kylie Jenner is reincarnated as a car, she'll come back a Charger.

Discarded to the ash heap of history by draconian government emissions mandates in 2023, the gas-fired Charger has been reborn for the 2026 model year. Maybe they should have called it the Dodge Phoenix. This hellion is not just the Woodward Dream Cruise-ing, head-turning, tire-smoking muscle car of old – it is something much, much more.

Let me count the ways.

You're right. The last-gen Charger was diabolical in the snow – or in the rain for that matter. Based on an ancient rear-wheel-drive chassis, the V8-powered beast was an earth-pawing laughfest on dry asphalt. But you had to drive it on eggshells once there was precipitation in the air. Oh, I had some lurid moments.

Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

Fully-loaded the 2026 Dodge Charger SIXpack can cost up to $67K, one of the most expensive hot hatches on the market. Thats still a bargain compared to a comparably-equipped, $82K BMW 5-series M-Sport.

Toward the end of its life, the last-gen Charger birthed an AWD V-6, which was a start. But with the smooth, turbocharged inline-6 cylinder Hurricane mill, the AWD Charger is fully realized.

At a stoplight on Telegraph Road before the blizzard, I engaged launch control just as I would a Porsche Cayman. Left-foot brake in, right-foot throttle in. Wait for the revs to stabilize at 3,000 RPM. Release the Kraken.

The beast exploded forward without hesitation, the AWD beautifully translating 531-pound-feet of torque to the road with poise while the eight-speed transmission fired off buttery shifts. WHAP! WHAP! WHAP!

Did I say fully-realized? The Charger will soon come with a spine-tingling Eightpack, which will also benefit from AWD. Can't wait. But make my Charger a Sixpack.

Payne, have you gone insane? Recommending a Charger muscle car six-banger?

Not insane. With its remade STLA Large platform and suspension, the Charger is no longer a one-trick, drag-strip pony. This rodeo horse wants to run the barrel course, too – and it'll likely rotate better with the lighter six-cylinder up front (to be fair, I'll wait for the V-8 to render final judgment).

Through the lake-road twisties of Oakland Country, Charger Sixpack was actually fun. Not an adjective I would have used with the ol' Charger. More like hair-raising. Teeth-gritting. Knuckle-whitening, maybe. Not fun. Sure, the Sixpack still weighs (cough) 4,800 pounds, but it's manageable. The Sixpack is fun, fun, fun. Like a hot hatch.

And like a hot hatch, it was utilitarian when I needed it.

For an airport run, I raised its huge rear hatch and shoveled in two suitcase and a laptop bag. Plenty of room to spare. The rear seats easily swallowed my 6'5"-inch legs. And the interior design? As gorgeous as the exterior. Mrs. Payne approved.

My top-line Scat Pack Plus tester featured a hoodless instrument display and head-up display paired with crisp, horizontal dash lines. Pistol grip shifter, bolstered seats, panoramic sunroof, 168-color adjustable ambient lights (my wife likes the blue). Standard 12.3-inch digital driver display, adaptive cruise control, wireless charger and microwave (kidding about that last one). Not bad for $67K (or $57k for the standard Scat).

Payne, $67K for a hot hatch? You call that affordable?

Fair question. The king does have rich tastes. But so do the smaller, compact, front-wheel-drive $55K Integra Type S and all-wheel-drive VW Golf R. Charger's rich taste gets you a full-size car with substantially more cargo room. All-wheel drive (which the Integra doesn't have). Rear-seat room (which the Golf R is shy of). The Integra is only available in a manual, the Golf R automatic only like Charger. But the Charger packs two more cylinders over its turbo-4 brothers.

VROOOM!

One hundred more horsepower.

GRRRR!

And did I mention Kylie Jenner hips?

The interior is the icing on the cake. Not just the lovely design but outstanding ergonomics (check out the volume and station control buttons on the back of the steering wheel) and that head-up display, right out of a BMW M-class.

In the twisties, I toggled SPORT mode with the handy, Porsche-like MODE selector on the steering wheel and knocked the pistol shifter into manual mode. The head-up display shows a horizontal RPM bar just like a modern race car – so that I could shift gears with the steering-wheel paddles at redline without taking my eyes off the road. Genius.

Like a $82K BMW 5-series M-Sport costing 15 grand more. But the Bimmer isn't a hatchback, and isn't as handsome. Call Charger the upper end of the affordable hot hatch segment.

By week's end, I couldn't wait to get into my salt-caked Dodge each morning. Launch control. SPORT mode with rear-drive-only for drifting. Endless interior color choices. Configurable instrument display.

It's good to hang out with the king.

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.

2026 Dodge Charger

★★★★

Vehicle type: All-wheel drive, five-passenger coupe and sedan
Price: Base $51,990, including $1,995 destination charge ($67,360 Scat Plus coupe with Customer Preferred Package as tested)
Powerplant: 3.0-liter, twin-turbo inline-6 cylinder
Power: 420 horsepower, 468 pound-feet torque (R/T); 550 horsepower, 531 pound-feet torque (Scat Pack)
Transmission: Eight-speed automatic
Performance: 0-60 mph, 3.9 seconds (Scat Pack, mfr.); top speed, 177 mph (Scat Pack)
Weight: 4,815 pounds
Range: EPA est. mpg, 16 city/26 highway/20 combined (Scat Pack); 91 octane fuel required

Report card

Highs: King Hot Hatch; AWD agility in the snow
Lows: Porky; gets pricey

TECHNOLOGY

GADGETS

Here's who shined at the Consumer Electronics Show

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Last month's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas did not disappoint. The number one question I'm asked every year is, "What was the best item you saw?" Sure, there were endless companies pitching devices with AI and such. But after walking the CES show floors for more than 10 miles daily, there's no doubt in my mind that Lenovo, the world's largest PC company, stole the show with a concept product.

If I had to pick just one product, it would clearly be the **Legion Pro Rollable (concept) 16-inch top-tier gaming laptop**. Currently, it is not available for purchase, nor are there plans …. yet. According to a company spokesperson, "Lenovo has no current plans for commercialization (of the Legion Pro Rollable), and shipment is not committed. Development continues as an exploration of future form factors, pending user feedback and ecosystem readiness."

While the Legion Pro Rollable laptop is said to be in Lenovo's gaming category, a company representative agreed with my thoughts that it is far from limited to gaming. The Legion Pro Rollable laptop is innovative with its expanding screen, yes, I said expanding screen, which I saw with my own eyes.

Once it opens, the Lenovo PureSight rollable OLED is in Focus mode at 16 inches. Go into Tactical mode, and it expands to 21.5 inches; in Arena mode, it fully expands to 24 inches. What I found impressive is that while the actual display expands, there are no seams, lines or grooves to be seen or felt.

Lenovo described the expansion technology in a recent press release as a "display that unrolls from both ends using a dual-motor, tension-based design that allows the display to expand and contract with minimal vibration and noise and translates to a smooth, controlled expansion and contraction experience."

I did confirm with gamer friends that the concept is more than appealing: having up to a 24-inch display for competitions tucked in a backpack, ready for use anywhere, anytime. For me, having a laptop with a document open on one side and email and messages spread across the other, in a large-screen format, is priceless, particularly while traveling.

The Legion Pro Rollable Concept will have top-spec Intel Core Ultra processors and an NVIDIA GeForce RTX 5090 Laptop GPU. It is said to have a refresh rate of 90Hz POC; 165Hz+ target, and lab testing had it at over 25,000 cycles (all supplied by Lenovo) for longevity. If you are a high-tech person, you get it. If not, just know it's powerful, fast and packed with AI horsepower.

Lenovo had many other computer announcements for home, work and play that will be made available throughout the year. Many include AI software experiences that are designed to fit naturally into everyday life. The Lenovo announcements are too numerous to list, but include business and consumer models across desktops, ThinkBooks, and portable laptops. They also announced AI Glasses and AI Sensor Hub. The demos of their AI facial recognition software were something to see and included measurements of facial features. Other new computer models feature a screen you can write on (not permanent).

The Motorola World Cup 26 Edition razr. Motorola / TNS

Motorola, the official smartphone partner of the FIFA World Cup 2026, worked with Lenovo to announce additions, including its first foldable mobile device, a special-edition **FIFA Razr World Cup 26**, and a combined Motorola and Lenovo ecosystem. It includes an AI-powered camera system, an IP48 weather protection rating, and a 4500mAh rechargeable battery.

The Razr will have multicolor graphics printed on a soft vegan leather cover. There will be other FIFA personalization options, a ringtone with the official FIFA tournament theme, and exclusive wallpapers. Users can add a FIFA watermark to their photos to personalize their FIFA World Cup memories.

The smartphone will be available on motorola.com and at Verizon this month for $699.99.

www.lenovo.com

Contact Gregg Ellman at greggellman@mac.com. Follow him on Twitter @greggellman.

Lenovo / TNS
The Lenovo Legion Pro Rollable 16-inch laptop.

Apple finally releases updated AirTags

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

I'm a huge fan of Apple's AirTags – the small, round Bluetooth finder that works with Apple's Find My network to help you keep track of your stuff.

The AirTag was introduced in April of 2021, and now Apple has released the second generation AirTag that promises expanded connectivity range and improved findability.

Apple has released the second generation AirTag, with improved range and louder speakers and better device location sharing all for the same price as the previous model. Apple / TNS

I'm not afraid to say I lose my keys and my wallet (usually in my house) and I have come to rely on my AirTags to make quick work of locating them.

If you have a new enough iPhone, the AirTags can invoke "precision finding," which can show you on your iPhone's screen how far away the item is located and in even point an arrow to show you which way to walk.

The new AirTag will allow the user to use precision finding at distances up to 50 percent farther away than the original AirTag. By the way, the old AirTag looks just like the new one.

If your iPhone doesn't have the ability to do precision finding, you are able to make the AirTag chirp to make itself known (and hopefully, found).

The 2026 AirTag has a 50 percent louder speaker, which will be a delight to my wife, who has trouble figuring out where her AirTagged items are hiding even when it is beeping in the same room.

The new AirTags will now allow users of the Apple Watch (series 9 or newer) to see the precision finding direction/distance on their watch face.

According to Apple, "The new AirTag integrates seamlessly with Share Item Location, an iOS feature designed to help users recover a misplaced item by temporarily and securely sharing its location with trusted third parties, such as airlines, so they can assist in recovering delayed luggage or other lost items. Apple has partnered directly with more than 50 airlines to privately and securely accept Share Item Location links."

According to SITA, a leading IT provider for airlines, carriers report that using Share Item Location has reduced baggage delays by 26 percent and reduced incidences of "truly lost" or unrecoverable luggage by 90 percent. Access is granted only to authorized personnel via secure Apple Account or partner authentication. The shared location will be disabled as soon as a user is reunited with their item, can be stopped by the owner at any time, and will automatically expire after seven days.

The new AirTags are priced at $29 each or $99 for a four-pack from Apple.com or Apple retail stores.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.

Fears about TikTok's policy changes point to a deeper problem

By CASEY FIESLER
University of Colorado Boulder
(The Conversation)

A little over a year after TikTok temporarily went dark in the United States and users were greeted with a message explaining that "a law banning TikTok has been enacted," those same U.S. users opened the app to find a pop-up message requiring them to agree to new terms before they could continue scrolling.

The new terms of service and privacy policy went into effect on Jan. 22, following the app's sale from ByteDance to TikTok USDS Joint Venture LLC, a majority American-owned company that reportedly will control U.S. users' data and content and the app's recommendation algorithm.

People see this kind of pop-up all the time, and according to research, the "biggest lie on the internet" is that people ever read anything before clicking "agree." But given many users' unease about the ownership change – including fears of swapping Chinese surveillance for U.S. surveillance – it is unsurprising that this time, people paid attention. Screenshots of legal language spread quickly online, accompanied by warnings about sweeping new data collection.

I'm both a TikTok content creator and a tech ethics and policy researcher who has studied website terms and conditions, especially whether people read them (they don't) and how well they understand them (they also don't). When I saw the outrage on social media, I immediately dove down a terms of service and privacy policy rabbit hole that had me tumbling into the wayback machine and also looking at similar policies on other apps and TikTok's policies in other countries.

In the end, I discovered that in the most widely shared examples, the language that sounded most alarming had either hardly changed at all or described practices that are fairly standard across social media.

Some changes aren't really changes

Consider the list of "sensitive personal information" in TikTok's new privacy policy, which includes items like sexual orientation and immigration status. Many users interpreted this list as evidence that TikTok had begun collecting more personal data. However, this exact same list appeared in the previous version of TikTok's U.S. privacy policy, which was last updated in August 2024. And in both cases, the language focuses on "information you disclose" – for example, in your content or in responses to user surveys.

This language is in place presumably to comply with state privacy laws such as California's Consumer Privacy Act, which includes requirements for disclosure of the collection of certain categories of information. TikTok's new policy specifically cited the California law. Meta's privacy policy lists very similar categories, and this language overall tends to signal regulatory compliance by disclosing existing data collection rather than additional surveillance.

Location tracking also prompted concerns. The new policy states that TikTok may "collect precise location data, depending on your settings." This is a change, but it's also common practice for the major social media apps.

The change also brings the company's U.S. policy in line with TikTok policies in other countries. For example, the company's European Economic Area privacy policy has very similar language, and users in the U.K. have to grant precise location access to use a "Nearby Feed" for finding events and businesses near them.

Though apps have other ways to approximate location, such as IP address, a user will have to grant permission through their phone's location services in order for TikTok to access precise location via GPS – permission that TikTok has not yet requested from U.S. users. However, the new policy opens the door for users having the option to grant that permission in the future.

THE CONVERSATION

No news does not equal good news

None of this is to say that users are wrong to be cautious. Even if TikTok's legal language around data privacy is standard for the industry, who controls your data and your feed is still very relevant. Uninstalls for the app spiked 130 percent in the days following the change, with many users expressing concern about the ties that the new owners have to President Donald Trump – notably Oracle, the company led by Trump supporter Larry Ellison.

It also didn't help that TikTok's first week under American ownership was a complete disaster. Severe technical problems – later attributed by TikTok to a data center power failure – happened to coincide with the new ownership announcement, fueling widespread concerns about censorship of content critical of the U.S. government. Perhaps some users remembered that Trump once joked about making the platform "100 percent MAGA."

But regardless of what actually happened, at this point distrusting tech companies isn't exactly irrational.

Clarity and trust

Conflating very real structural risks with unfamiliar sentences in legal documents, however, can obscure what is actually changing and what isn't. The misleading information about TikTok's policy changes that spread across social media is also evidence of a well-known design failure: Most tech policies aren't made to be read.

My own work revealed that these documents are often written at a college or even graduate school reading level. Another analysis once calculated that if every American read the privacy policy for each website they visit for just a year, it would cost $785 billion in lost leisure and productivity time.

So the discussion about TikTok's policies is a case study in the deep mismatch between how tech companies communicate and how people interpret risk, particularly in an era of exceptionally low trust in both Big Tech and government. Right now, ambiguity doesn't feel neutral. It feels threatening.

Instead of dismissing these reactions as overblown, I believe that companies should recognize that if a huge portion of their user base assumes the worst, that's not a reading comprehension problem; it's a trust problem. So writing data privacy policies more legibly is a start, but rebuilding any kind of inherent trust in the stewardship of that data is probably the more important challenge.

Casey Fiesler is an associate professor of information science at the University of Colorado Boulder. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

HOME&GARDEN

DESIGN RECIPES

Home offices

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

As working from home continues to evolve, so does the design of the home office. Today's most successful workspaces balance comfort, flexibility and visual beauty.

Home offices for many are an extension or replacement for the traditional office. Unlike years past, the move is away from rigid, uncomfortable spaces to spaces that are flexible and comfortable.

Considering integrating a home office in your home? Here are tips on what's in and what's out.

What's in

1. Cozy design. From comfy seating to layered lighting and soft, sumptuous furniture, comfort is key.

2. Wallpaper. Wallpaper remains on trend, especially textured, either bold or subtle.

3. Bright, uplifting color palettes. Pops of bold color help energize a space more than neutrals.

4. Flexible furniture. Furniture that can be transitioned or work "double duty" is ideal for those looking for budget or value driven solutions.

5. Layers. Instead of starkness, elements such as area rugs, throws and artwork help make a space feel finished and energized.

What's out

1. Built-in desks. Built-ins, while potentially helpful to save space, for many are restrictive and outdated.

2. Extreme minimalism. Stark, overly cold spaces are out. In home offices, the trend is toward comfort and coziness.

3. Tone on tone. Pops of color are energizing and fresh.

4. Poor lighting. As many homes may not have an abundance of overhead lighting, various sources of light are key, from floor lamps to table lamps and task lighting.

5. Themed spaces. Home offices that are overly personalized such as a home office focused on sports or a travel theme are often too personalized.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

ABOVE: A below grade, lower level space that feels colorful and bright. **RIGHT:** A small work area in an urban residence. **BELOW:** A home office that displays a drop top desk that can been closed and hidden. Handout photos / TNS

When should I plan for summer projects?

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

The unrelenting cold weather may have you dreaming about the longer, warmer days of summer. However, if you want to get the most out of your home this summer, it might be a good idea to start planning your big summer projects now.

Pool, deck, patio and outdoor kitchen installations are all popular summer projects – but how long do they take? Many homeowners are surprised to learn that these projects can take over three months to complete, and planning ahead is the best way to ensure they get done in time for summer.

Not all summer projects are created equally. Pools tend to take the longest to install, with the average in-ground pool installation taking about three months from start to finish. However, if you want additional features like a hot tub or waterfall, the installation process can take even longer. Deck and patio installations can take anywhere from a few days to several weeks, depending on the size and complexity of the project. Outdoor kitchens are another popular summer project. Depending on the type of outdoor kitchen you want, installation could take weeks or months.

Dreamstime / TNS

Now is the ideal time to start planning big summer projects, like pool and deck installations.

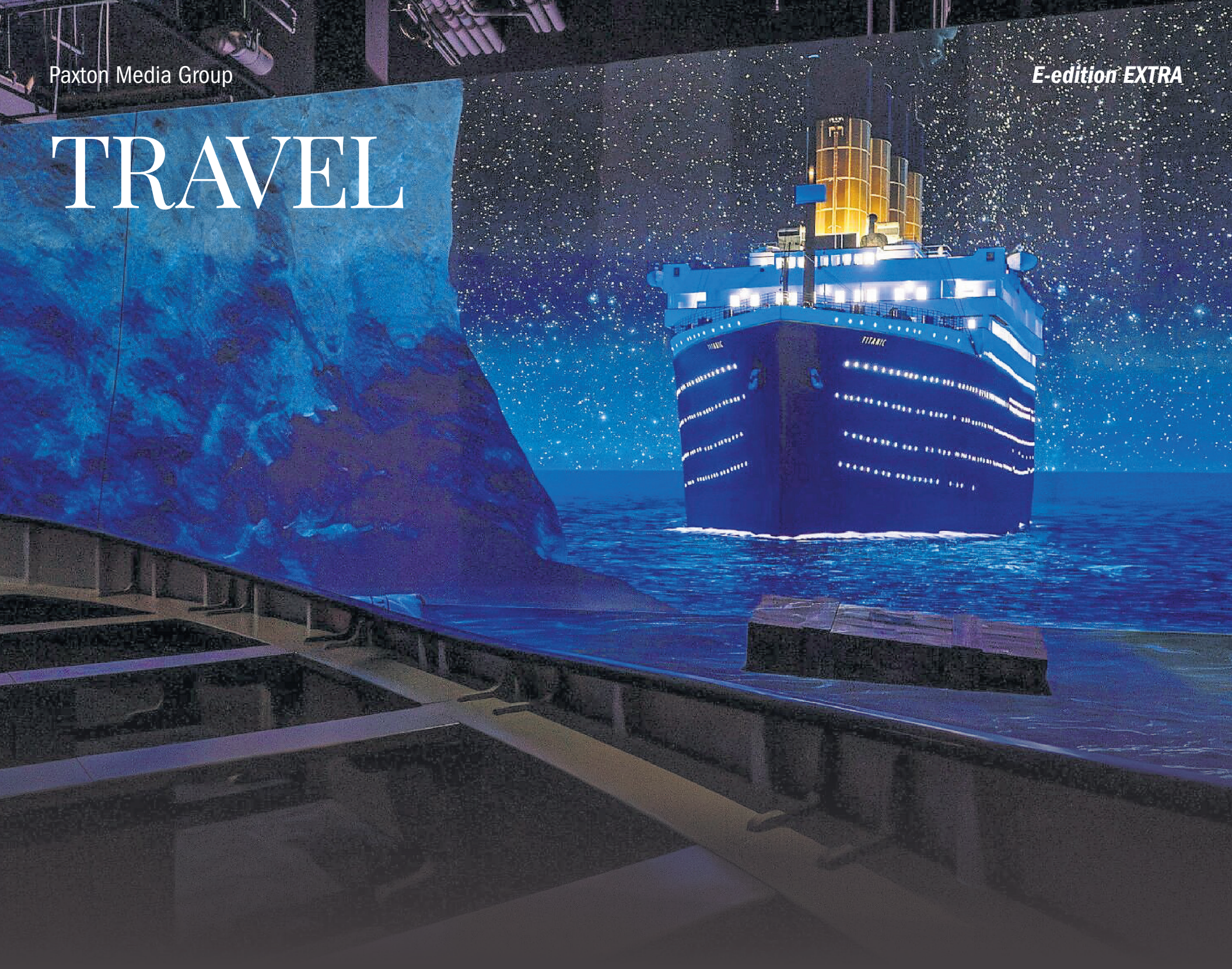
Another consideration is whether you need a permit and/or approval from your homeowner's association. Depending on your location, permits and HOA approval can take several weeks. Your contractor can help walk you through which approvals are necessary in your area, so consider booking a contractor sooner rather than later.

Once your summer projects are complete, you'll also need time to decorate and get the area ready for people to use it. If you're planning on entertaining, try to complete any large projects a month before the event. This will give you plenty of time to prepare the space and will prevent any stress.

Planning ahead also has other benefits. You might be surprised by how much can be done in the spring, so you can get your projects done early and avoid the summer rush. By starting early, you also might be able to take advantage of better pricing.

Even if you don't want to start your project until early summer, many contractors, especially those who work in popular summer trades, like pool installation and landscaping, get booked up months in advance, so now is the time to call. Starting your summer projects now will result in faster project times and maybe even lower overall costs.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.



Explore 'Titanic'

New South Florida immersive experience puts you in a lifeboat for firsthand view of history

By KARI BARNETT
South Florida Sun-Sentinel (TNS)

The tragic story of the RMS Titanic has played out on the big screen, and in musicals, novels, exhibits, documentaries and TV miniseries. Now, it arrives in South Florida as a new immersive experience.

Guests can climb aboard a lifeboat to experience the historic ship's final moments – and watch from a passenger's perspective, floating in the dark waters on a star-filled, bitterly cold night, as distress signals were being sent and Titanic disappeared into the ocean.

The experience is called "Titanic: An Immersive Voyage," and it will be available through Tuesday, March 31, at the South Florida PBS Studios in Boynton Beach.

Guests may know the facts already – that the so-called "unsinkable" ship struck an iceberg and sank in the early morning hours of April 15, 1912, killing more than 1,500 people during its maiden voyage from Southampton, England, to New York City.

But this immersive experience offers an opportunity to take a trip through history: To learn about the ship with 3D views, video animations, life-sized reconstructions and narrative storytelling; view artifacts; and use virtual reality to go 2.5 miles below sea level in a deep-sea submersible to see the wreck site.

Titanic's sister and rescue ships also get a featured spot in the multisensory journey, which takes from 45 to 90 minutes to complete.

Fans of James Cameron's 1997 "Titanic" movie can even pose as passengers in an artificial intelligence photo booth to re-create the "I'm flying" scene between Jack and Rose on the ship's bow.

This is the third immersive experience presented at South Florida PBS Studios, following presentations on Leonardo Da Vinci and Egyptian pharaohs.

Below, we obtained more details during a Q&A session with Jeneissy Azcuy, chief marketing and education officer with South Florida PBS, that's been edited for brevity and accuracy.

Q: How did South Florida PBS find out about this experience and bring it here?

A: Exhibition Hub created the experience. We discovered it at last year's PBS Annual Meeting, where several staff members were invited to visit the immersive experience and came away impressed. Knowing that PBS had produced excellent programming about the Titanic, with a new documentary from American Public Television scheduled for spring 2026, we saw an opportunity to bring the experience to South Florida. Our research also revealed a compelling local connection – several Titanic passengers had ties to South Florida, making it especially relevant for our community.

Q: Why is it important to learn about Titanic and keep its history alive, especially in an interactive way?

A: The Titanic represents far more than a maritime disaster. It is a profound human story that offers timeless lessons about hubris, class divisions, heroism and tragedy. By keeping this history alive through interactive experiences, we ensure that new generations connect emotionally with these lessons in ways that textbooks simply cannot achieve.

An immersive approach transforms the Titanic from a distant historical event into a visceral, personal experience. When you're standing on a replica of the bow, sitting in a lifeboat or exploring the wreckage through VR (virtual reality), the 1,500 lives lost become real people, not just statistics. You begin to understand the human decisions, both wise and catastrophic, that led to that fateful night.

These interactive experiences also illuminate broader themes that remain relevant today: the dangers of overconfidence in technology and the life-and-death consequences of ignored warnings. By engaging with this history in such an immersive way, visitors don't just learn facts, they develop empathy, critical thinking, and a deeper appreciation for how individual choices and societal structures can shape tragic outcomes. It's this emotional connection that ensures the lessons of the Titanic continue to resonate and inform how we approach challenges in our own time.

Q: How is the virtual reality experience?

A: The VR aspect of "Titanic: An Immersive Voyage" is truly extraordinary. It takes you on a breathtaking journey to the ocean floor, where you encounter the haunting wreckage of the Titanic resting in the deep. As you explore the sunken vessel, you can observe the ship's remains in stunning detail before the experience transitions, bringing you back in time to April 14, 1912. Suddenly, you're aboard the magnificent ship itself, witnessing the tragic events of that fateful night unfold around you.

Q: What is your favorite part of the exhibit?

A: My favorite part is the immersive show, particularly the experience of sitting in the lifeboat. From that vantage point, you're drawn into the unfolding drama as you learn about the critical messages being transmitted, some received, some tragically ignored. The experience weaves together the rich history of the ship, its crew and passengers, building a deeper understanding of life aboard the Titanic. Then, as the narrative progresses, you witness the heartbreaking sequence of events leading to its catastrophic end. There's something profoundly moving about experiencing this history while seated in a lifeboat, which adds an emotional weight and sense of immediacy that makes the story feel incredibly real and personal.

Q: "Titanic" overlaps with the "Egyptian Pharaohs: From Cheops to Ramses II" immersive experience on display through Sunday, March 29. How do you fit each exhibit into the facility?

A: We've successfully separated the two experiences by utilizing different sections of our substantially expanded campus. Our recently opened, state-of-the-art Cornelia T. Bailey Cultural Arts Center, an 8,000-square-foot facility, hosts portions of the "Egyptian Pharaohs" experience across its immersive dome, Taylor Performance Hall and Innovation Lab. Our 4,000-square-foot immersive studio hosts the "Egyptian Pharaohs" immersive show.

For "Titanic," we've transformed office space into a museum-style gallery featuring authentic Titanic artifacts, a replica of the ship's bow for photo opportunities and the VR experience. The immersive voyage itself takes place in one of our studios, complete with a lifeboat where visitors can sit for added realism.

Each experience has its own dedicated entrance: Guests access "Egyptian Pharaohs" through the Bailey Cultural Arts Center, while "Titanic: An Immersive Voyage" is entered through the back of the South Florida PBS Studios.

If you go

"Titanic: An Immersive Voyage"
Jan. 30-March 31

South Florida PBS Studios, 3401 S. Congress Ave., Boynton Beach

$45 for adults; $35 for seniors, students, military and first responders; and free for guests age 12 and younger (not recommended for children younger than 5)

southfloridapbs.org/titanic/

A simulation shows what it would have been like to row a lifeboat away from the Titanic at the "Titanic: An Immersive Voyage" exhibit at Union Station.
Emily Curiel / The Kansas City Star / TNS

TRAVEL TIPS

Destinations, accommodations and companies that shine for travelers with disabilities

By MIA TAYLOR
TravelPulse (TNS)

Manaemedia / Dreamstime / TNS

Air travel is perhaps one of the most notoriously difficult parts of any journey, with a 2022 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office pointing out that travelers with disabilities continue to face a "range of barriers to accessible air travel" at every step of the process, from passenger screening to onboard planes.

Worldwide, an estimated 1.3 billion individuals – or 1 in 6 people – live with a significant disability. That's about 16 percent of the global population, according to the World Health Organization. And it's a very substantial market of potential travel customers.

Just how valuable is this market?

In the past two years, the majority of adults with disabilities (63 percent) have taken at least one trip, and about one-third have taken three or more trips, according to the 2024 Open Doors report, which measures how often adults with disabilities travel. Moreover, these individuals spent almost $50 billion across 76.9 million trips.

The same report indicates that travelers with disabilities are busy exploring a long list of domestic destinations (Atlanta chief among them). Many are also venturing beyond U.S. borders to visit Mexico, Europe and the Caribbean.

This data is impressive, especially given the reality that individuals with disabilities continue to face numerous challenges when traveling.

Air travel is perhaps one of the most notoriously difficult parts of any journey, with a 2022 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office pointing out that travelers with disabilities continue to face a "range of barriers to accessible air travel" at every step of the process, from passenger screening to onboard planes. That includes difficulties obtaining a wheelchair or customer assistance, to obstacles accessing onboard lavatories.

A separate report published from MMGY titled "Portrait of Travelers with Disabilities: Mobility and Accessibility," further underscores this fraught reality, explaining that the "challenges for this group are very real and are found at every step of the travel-planning process and journey." Some of the key takeaways from the MMGY findings included:

- Four in 10 travelers with disabilities have had their mobility aid lost or damaged by an airline.
- Six in 10 have experienced extended wait times for mobility assistance at the airport before or after their flight.
- More than half (54 percent) have been given a room at check-in that did not match the room they booked.
- 81 percent have dealt with inaccessible showers or tubs, and 52 percent have encountered beds that were too high for them to access.

While the travel industry has a long way to go to be genuinely accessible to all, the good news is that a growing number of destinations, brands and tour operators stand out for their efforts thus far to bridge the gap and break down barriers.

Here are some of the destinations, tour operators, transportation companies and more that are helping to make travel far more accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Destinations

Ann Arbor, Michigan

Destination Ann Arbor's approach to accessibility is grounded in a clear mission: make inclusive travel a core part of the visitor experience, not an afterthought.

To help Ann Arbor achieve that goal, the destination regularly convenes an Accessibility Roundtable made up of disability advocates, the local Disability Network, nonprofits, and community leaders "who meet to guide long-term accessibility strategy and shared priorities," says Chad Wiebesick, director of media relations and special projects for Destination Ann Arbor.

"This collaborative structure ensures accessibility efforts are not a one-time initiative, but a sustained commitment shaped by the lived experiences of people with disabilities," Wiebesick tells TravelPulse.

So what does that mean in practice for visitors with disabilities?

In partnership with Wheel the World and the local Disability Network, more than 50 hotels, attractions, restaurants, and cultural venues across the Ann Arbor area have completed in-depth accessibility assessments capturing over 200 data points per location.

Those assessments went far beyond basic ADA checklists to document the real-world details travelers with disabilities need to plan confidently, including entrance routes, restroom layouts, elevator dimensions, seating configurations, and more.

All of this verified information is now publicly available on the Wheel the World website, a travel booking platform for individuals with disabilities that allows travelers to find, compare, and book travel experiences tailored to their accessibility needs.

As for Ann Arbor, the community's efforts culminated in the city becoming Michigan's first Wheel the World Destination Verified community. Having earned such a designation is an important step, underscoring Ann Arbor's care and commitment to travelers with disabilities.

Ann Arbor's community-centered approach has also earned the city national recognition. And perhaps even more importantly, the community, says Wiebesick, is now serving as a model for other destinations that are working to better support accessible travel.

Jacksonville, Florida

With 22 miles of beaches and year-round sunshine, the city of Jacksonville, Florida is a perennial favorite among travelers. And the good news is, the destination's leaders are busy working to ensure that Jacksonville's offerings are accessible to all travelers.

In 2023, for instance, Visit Jacksonville, the city's destination management organization (DMO), became Florida's first autism-certified DMO. The designation, awarded by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES), means that the Visit Jacksonville staff has undergone specialized training to better understand and meet the needs of autistic visitors and their families.

That designation is particularly meaningful in light of an IBCCES survey of parents, families, and autistic individuals, which found that 94 percent of these respondents would take more vacations or visit more new places if they had access to autism-trained and certified options.

In Jacksonville there are several attractions designed to be accessible for individuals with autism. That includes the city's Museum of Contemporary Art, which offers Autism Creates (an educational initiative for children with autism spectrum disorders). The museum also provides an American Sign Language interpreter upon request.

To provide still more assistance to travelers with autism, Visit Jacksonville's website includes a page that lists other austism-friendly offerings and attractions in the area.

Vacation rentals

Finding accessible accommodations when traveling can be another significant challenge. But it's one that the luxury vacation villa rental company Rental Escapes has worked to address.

The company, which has more than 5,000 destinations in its global portfolio, offers a curated collection of accessible and wheelchair-friendly luxury villas designed to support travelers with limited mobility without sacrificing comfort or experience.

That includes villas spanning the Caribbean, Mexico, Europe, and the United States, offering features such as single-level layouts, step-free entrances, wide doorways, elevators, ground-floor bathrooms and bedrooms, and roll-in showers.

Accessibility with Rental Escapes properties goes beyond the physical space, as well. For instance, each booking is guided by a dedicated villa specialist who personally confirms the available accessibility features at each property to ensure guests' specific needs are met. In addition, select villas offer dedicated on-site staff who provide comfort and personalized support throughout the stay.

If additional assistance is needed, Rental Escapes can provide it through a concierge team that curates every detail, from bespoke private excursions to chef-led in-villa dining.

Tours and transportation

Custom Tours of DC

If Washington, DC, is on your to-do list as a disabled traveler, Custom Tours of DC is here to ensure you have a smooth, memorable experience.

"Custom Tours of DC specializes in fully private, customized tours designed around each client's specific accessibility needs and mobility considerations," says Adam Plescia, the company's founder and owner.

Unlike standard group tours with fixed itineraries, the company creates flexible experiences that can be adjusted in real-time based on a traveler's energy levels, physical capabilities, and comfort, Plescia tells TravelPulse.

"Each tour includes a private, climate-controlled vehicle that serves as a personal rest space throughout the day, stocked with water and accommodations for medical devices or mobility aids," Plescia explains.

In addition, the company's guides are trained to design routes that prioritize ADA-accessible venues, well-maintained pathways, and rest opportunities while avoiding challenging terrain.

This type of one-on-one attention means guides can move at each client's pace, incorporate frequent breaks, and modify plans as needed– whether that means shortening a walking segment, adding a seated museum experience, or adjusting timing for medication schedules.

"Because every tour is built from scratch around the individual traveler rather than forcing them into a pre-set experience, Custom Tours of DC ensures that visitors with disabilities can experience Washington D.C.'s world-class museums, monuments, and cultural sites with dignity, safety, and genuine enjoyment," says Plescia.

Daytrip

If you're an avid globetrotter and you haven't already heard of Daytrip, now is the time to bookmark this company's website. The global private car transfer service is one of the best-kept secrets in the travel industry.

Daytrip makes transportation in destinations around the world practically effortless. Using the Daytrip website, travelers can book customizable, private door-to-door car transfers or day trips with English-speaking drivers.

I've personally used this company in Italy and Japan, and it made my travels a breeze when I needed transportation between cities. Their drivers are reliable, professional, and friendly, and they consistently show up on time. They also consistently go above and beyond to ensure my comfort.

I also love the fact that when booking car transportation with Daytrip, I have the option to add a sightseeing stop as part of my transfer between two locations. For travelers with disabilities, this means being able to explore locations and sights that may be harder to access using local public transportation.

Some of the specific services Daytrip offers include:

- Day trips: As the company's name indicates, you can use Daytrip to book a car and driver who will take you to explore a specific point of interest in the country you're visiting. This service can be used in a variety of scenarios, including when you're traveling by cruise and want to explore a destination during a port visit. Daytrip transportation also comes in handy when you're staying in a city and want to explore beyond city boundaries, where there may be little to no public transportation (Think: exploring smaller towns, castles, or nearby attractions).
- Transfers (one-way, return, and multi-city): Yet another helpful service offered by Daytrip is private transfer between two points with the option to add one or more sightseeing stops along the way. Travelers often use Daytrip for airport pick-ups and drop-offs as well.Past travelers with disabilities have written glowing reviews about Daytrip, including one family who said:

"We had two amazing experiences during our trip to Spain and Portugal with Daytrip. Walter drove us from Lisbon to Lagos and Nataliya drove us from Lagos to Seville. Both drivers were professional and kind. They both gave us some history and knowledge of the places we were arriving to. They accommodated our daughter who is in a wheelchair. I would highly recommend Daytrip as a transfer service."

Claire & George

One final, but especially notable, company is the Europe-based nonprofit organization Claire & George, which offers accessible holidays in Switzerland.

And for Florida resident Chelsea Bear, who was born with cerebral palsy (CP), the organization turned a trip to Switzerland into a deeply memorable experience that Bear told TravelPulse she will remember forever.

"Traveling with cerebral palsy, I'm always thinking 10 steps ahead: 'Will I be able to get around? Will it be accessible? Will people actually understand what I need?'," says Bear. "I love seeing new places, but it can also feel like I'm signing up for the unexpected."

Bear's 2024 trip to Switzerland with Claire & George, however, changed everything.

It wasn't the scenery or the food or the people she met that made the trip special (although all of those things were indeed memorable), says Bear. But the game changer was how supported and included Bear says she felt throughout the entire trip, thanks to Claire & George.

Managing Director Susanne Gäumann was on the journey the entire time and ensured that Bear could take part in everything, rather than just watching from the sidelines. "And she did it in a way that didn't make me feel like 'the disabled traveler' I just felt like a traveler," adds Bear.

What's more, each day of the trip was packed with moments that Bear says she still thinks about two years later.

"In St. Gallen, I explored the Old Town, wandered through the gorgeous St. Gallen Cathedral, and tried St. Galler Bratwurst," continues Bear. "I also got to tour the Appenzeller cheese factory, which made me appreciate Swiss cheese on a whole new level. We rode a cable car to the summit of Säntis Mountain. The views up there honestly didn't feel real."

These are just some of the experiences Bear had while traveling with Claire & George. The organization has more than a decade of experience planning holidays for individuals affected by physical or sensory disabilities. Their services include private tours and connecting travelers with accessible, wheelchair-friendly hotels.

For Bear, this type of support was especially meaningful. "Accessibility was never an afterthought on this trip; it was a part of every plan, city, and activity," she says. "Because of that, I got to actually experience Switzerland, not just 'see' it."